

Divorced

Mrs. M. V. Dahlgren



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DIVORCED.

A NOVEL.

BY

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"MEMOIRS OF ADMIRAL
DAHLGREN," ETC.



CHICAGO AND NEW YORK:
BELFORD, CLARKE & CO.
1887.

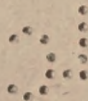
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PREFACE.

THE title of this novel, *Divorced*, explains the *motif* of this work, which is intended as a plea for the sacredness of the marriage tie, and also to exhibit some of the manifold dangers connected with our present system of divorce laws.

The delineations herein given are simply portrayal of types, and in no one instance are personal sketches.

My present wish, as in my former works, is to make fiction point a moral, and I desire here to thank the many friends all over the country who have hitherto encouraged me so generously to continue my efforts for reform. This, indeed, has always been acknowledged as the legitimate province of a writer, who aspires to consecrate his pen to the expression of virtuous sentiments.

If this story should happily cause the unreflecting, who contemplate marriage, to pause on the sacred threshold, and weigh well the future, I shall be repaid.

If, perchance, the plot of *Divorced* may be deemed over-wrought, I need only point to the divorce court

records, now on file, to find the types; and added to these, comes on a thronging procession, whose name will soon be legion!

Do our law-makers, our statesmen realize, that when bad laws are allowed to exist, in open violation of the Divine law, *retribution* must as surely come to the aggregate mass, as to the individual?

This is no sophism —

Our legislative, our judicial mistakes, as regards this whole question of Marriage and Divorce, are gradually but surely undermining the very foundations of the social structure.

Untold domestic tragedies are being enacted, throughout the length and breadth of this fair land, and the number goes on increasing, with alarming rapidity.

Much of this trouble is caused by our easy divorce laws.

These pages give but one out of the many phases of crimes that have occurred, and are liable to be engendered, as a consequence of the temptations our divorce laws present.

We are taught to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” Conspiracies and perjuries are fostered, and the licentiousness of roving fancies is incited, by our facility of divorce.

No home is secure, where so many different causes are permitted legally to disrupt the most sacred of all human ties.

Nor must we forget the coming generation. The cry of, *Whose is the child*, arises to-day from many a desecrated hearth-stone. Children learn to take part in the wrangling, and early begin *to hate*, with all the undisciplined vehemence of youth, either one parent or the other.

This is an awful evil, that cries aloud to heaven for redress.

M. V. D.

DIVORCED.

CHAPTER I.

A WEDDING.

“**A**S a matter of course, there is joy in our hearts, my fair Paulina, but I must say that this is a rather funereal manifestation of it,” said Neale Voland to the pale Paulina Peyton, his bride of an hour.

And it was a passing strange caprice, for a beautiful young girl, free to act as her own mistress, to select as the appointed time, the gloaming of a cheerless November day, with no other witnesses besides Hermann, the valet of the bridegroom, and Nora, the faithful old housekeeper, who had lived at Hazlehurst and taken charge of the homestead these many years; indeed, ever since the death of Paulina’s mother.

“I had rather thought of the glorious sunset hour than of these twilight shadows, Neale,” answered Paulina, with a dreamy languor that seemed rather to address itself to some invisible ideal than to the very material embodiment of a regular club man, such as Neale Voland really was.

“Dare say,” answered he, “but the stupid blunder of that sanctimonious parson whom you insisted should

perform the ceremony, who by some luckless misunderstanding confused his engagements and officiated at a funeral while we were in waiting, made a pleasing muddle, madam, which upset your romantic idea of a glowing sunset, and in addition deprived me, for the infinite space of two hours, of the coveted bliss of calling you mine."

They were seated in the embrasure of a window, and Paulina still gazed at the skurrying, leaden clouds, scarcely seeming to heed the presence of the man to whom she had but just an hour ago given herself, "for better or for worse."

"You are pleased to be captious, Neale," she quietly replied; "perchance you, also, take exception to my wearing a black dress, and to the fact that our wedding day is Friday."

"Not in the least," dryly responded he, with a little short cough, as if his breath were fairly taken away. "My wilful angel may spread a banquet of thirteen covers for our wedding feast, salute mine ears with the dirge-like strains of Mozart's requiem as a befitting epithalamium, then send me away in a hearse, if it so please her adorable fancy, yet in spite of all her cruelties she is my angel still;" and so saying he drew her closely to him with an air of ownership quite in contradiction to his words.

"I am so pleased, dear," she said, now turning upon him her deep and earnest eyes, "that you are in very truth, as I know you must be, quite superior to the idle fancies that fetter so many minds."

This sentiment was a true expression of Paulina's character. She was always seeking to be free from the restraining opinions of others, and this wild desire to think and act for herself, unbiased by any one, had led her to commit the fatal mistake of a hasty marriage, which she had made upon a short acquaintance, and without taking counsel of any person. Then, too, was she led to show her disdain of current superstitions by selecting a dress, an hour, a day for this supreme act, which to the vulgar belief would be deemed unlucky.

Yet hers was a superior nature, that only needed direction and discipline. Her eccentricities were but the outcropping of a rich, uncultivated soil, while a generous nature gave promise of an ample harvest of excellence, at some future time, when her energies should be well-directed.

Alas, poor child, she had married this man, misled by the mirage of her illusions, knowing him in no-wise as he really was, but having built up a secret shrine in her own imagination.

It was before this sekos she had pledged her faith and the loyalty of a life, and she had invested this deity of her hallucinations with all the fair proportions of a true creation.

Thus she had attributed to this imaginary being the highest qualities of honor, delicacy, and above all of absolute truth.

He was to her, as one descended from out the

riven clouds, panoplied in the complete armor of the virtues.

And does it not often come to pass, that sensitive and imaginative women marry men who are but the merest illusive forms of the types that they have selected, and endowed in fancy with every pleasing trait.

Nor are these mistakes made by the ignoble, but they are rather the dangers attendant upon ideal aspirations.

There is so little in our transitory existence to fill up in any degree the measure of our yearnings, when one looks beyond that narrow limit which the immediate bodily needs exact.

We may calmly reason about the philosophy of life; we may successfully struggle to meet its actual physical requirements; but what can satisfy the longings of a poetic temperament?

Alas, for Paulina's vague idealizations, that had led her to become the *alter ego* of a man, whose sentiments were a displeasing antithesis to her own, in every particular.

Neale Voland had an absolutely simple creed, but he belonged to a very large communion. He worshiped the god of respectability. Whatever a man of fashion, a club man, might do and not lose caste, was for him permissible and admissible.

If society indorsed an action, it was as the promulgation of a gospel, righteous in his eyes. But beyond its decrees his conscience seemed to be at rest. His

soul, if soul it could be called that directed his life, was thus narrowed down to so fine a point that it moved like the mariner's needle in an extremely small compass.

Of course he was essentially a self-seeker; why should he not be?

Society exacted no real abnegations, it only required the observance of certain forms, and these prescribed limits never interfered with the luxurious indulgence of voluptuous taste. They simply created an artificial standard, that was in fact no barrier to the pleasures of life.

Although Neale was secretly annoyed at the eccentric taste of his winsome bride, yet as there were no lookers-on, no society reporters present, to make the world the wiser as to the manner of their nuptials, and as he was quite devoid of sentimental thoughts on the occasion, he could but smile serenely as a man may well afford to do, who, having just drawn a prize in a lottery, cares but little how cranked the wheel that revolves to him that which he desires.

“Forsooth, my darling,” said the bridegroom, in the blandest of tones, “this is a wonderful merry-making of ours, for a wedding-day. No cards, no cake, no guests, and no feast of any kind. Have you not a faint suspicion, my Paulina, that society may call us to account for such an extraordinary departure from conventional rules?”

Neale Voland had very white and even teeth, but

when he smiled, there was a certain gleam about them that gave one rather the feeling of a challenge than of social hilarity. The tone of his voice, too, was low and perfectly regulated, yet there was an indefinable sarcasm in its inflections, which could rather be felt than defined.

Whatever it was, Paulina was too sensitive not to be aware of it.

She seemed to arouse herself, as one beginning to awaken out of pleasant dreams, and, scarcely realizing that she spoke her thoughts, murmured something about "the baseless fabric of a vision."

This was rather too much for the equanimity of her matter-of-fact companion, who now answered with some asperity :

"I rather fancy, madam, that I am neither base nor baseless."

"*You!*" answered she; "why, certainly not. Who intimated such a possibility!"

"I thought, perhaps," said Neale, with some slight embarrassment, "that you were pleased to allude to some phases of my past life."

"Phases of your past life!" repeated Paulina in a dazed way. "What phases, Neale?"

"Oh, come now, sweetness," expostulated he, "if you *have* heard somewhat of my marital infelicities, isn't it rather unkind, in the very heyday of our new-found bliss, to be posing that way, for effect?"

During this little speech, which was rattled off in a curt way, Paulina's deep blue-gray eyes opened wide, and

wider, as she stared upon him with a startled gaze. She looked like one who had been in a trance state, but who, by some sudden electric shock, has been painfully recalled to consciousness.

“My husband,” she said, “your words chill and benumb me. There is something cruel in them, but I know not what.”

“This, madam,” answered he, now quite exasperated, “is a dramatic scene, which should have been played out before the recent tableau of our marriage ceremony was enacted.”

As these words, uttered in a cold and measured tone fell upon her ear, Paulina instinctively withdrew from the encircling arm of her husband, and sinking upon an ottoman within the recessed window where they were, she sat with clasped hands and a bewildered questioning look, that was painful.

Her lips opened as if to speak, and then closed with a compressed effort.

“Well now,” said Neale, “is our newly wedded life to open with what I hate above all things — a scene? I might have had the sense to know, that there is no freedom to be compared to the club life.

“I was a fool to be so bewitched by a pair of blue eyes as to make a mistake a second time in choosing a wife.”

“A mistake a second time in choosing a wife,” whispered she, as if in echoing those brutal words she had suddenly grown afraid of the sound of her own voice.

“Pray be merciful, Neale to the dead, even when you wound the living.”

In the presence of this grief stricken bride, the man of fashion, the imperturbable society beau, callous as he was, looked disturbed. His handsome face, a trifle coarse perhaps, in the lines around the mouth and sensuous chin, grew slightly mottled, and the turgid veins of his thick-set, bovine neck, were swollen. He stood now face to face with a trouble which he had himself brought about, and without the moral courage to acknowledge his own guilt, he was in that most unreasonable of all moods; that of one, who knows that he has committed a wrong, and who in place of blaming himself, is inclined to lay the blame on the person wronged. Not that he was at all disturbed by any scruples of conscience as to what he had done — not at all. He had never in his life asked himself any weak questions as to what was right, but he had, with unvarying success, compelled obstacles to yield to his own wishes.

He had always subjected the various undertakings in which he had been engaged, to one crucial test — *expediency*. And hitherto, he had been quite satisfied with the results brought about by the exercise of this worldly wisdom.

Paulina was an orphan girl, who had just attained her legal majority; and freed from all tutelage, inexperienced and headstrong, she had, misled by her foolish caprice, been dazzled by the glamour of his accomplishments, and by the fascinating picture drawn, of

the brilliant society into which he would introduce her. This luminary was the first that had dawned upon the narrow horizon of her life's experiences, and she had like a silly moth fluttered for an instant, attracted to the incandescent brightness, only to be consumed.

It had been at best but a hurried courtship, full of concealments and passionate pursuit on the one side, and of silly dreams and false views of things on the other.

Out of these illusions, a reality difficult to meet had been evoked.

Neale Volland had a past history which had never been made known to Paulina, because of the fear that it might spoil his wooing.

He therefore concluded not to inform her of what it might be disagreeable for her to know until she should become his wife. In fact, such was the exaggerated sentimentalism of her expressions, as well as from some serious remarks made by her, that there was every reason to conclude that if Paulina knew him as he really was, she never would marry him.

He had unscrupulously availed himself of her romantic fancies, to make the marriage as hidden as possible, and also to hasten the time.

But now, in the first flush of complete success—the victim ensnared, the bride secured—why should he feel aught but exultation?

He certainly did not intend to make any damaging admissions, any unnecessary confidences; but there was one fact that had been carefully concealed from her,

that he felt must be made known so soon as she was absolutely his.

Nor was he impelled by any sense of honor in her regard to this decision; but he knew that it would be very imprudent to introduce her to society without first informing her of their real situation.

Nor was it even a kind consideration for her feelings that caused him to recognize this necessity, for in this matter, as in all other things, he only thought of himself.

There might indeed be reason to fear, that unless she was duly enlightened as to their position, she would make some awkward mistakes that would expose him to the sarcastic sneers of his associates.

Having thought the subject over, he decided to tell her so soon as the marriage ceremony was concluded, under the supposition that at such a moment she would be so infatuated with him, as to be to a degree indifferent to that which might, at a later day, more seriously displease her.

He was annoyed to observe her dreamy and abstracted mood, at a time when he supposed she would be solely preoccupied with him.

So from the very first as we have seen, his *amour propre* being wounded, he began to lose his temper. He knew that he did not understand her as he had imagined he did, and thus irritated at the whole situation, forgetting what a monstrous wrong had been enacted, he made those most unfeeling remarks.

The solemn truth was, that in his eagerness to secure Paulina, he had allowed her to consider him as a widower, as one whom the providence of God had left desolate, when, in reality, he was a *divorcé*.

This slight mistake must now be corrected, for was it not, after all, a distinction without a difference?

Was not Miriam laid away as effectually as if she were entombed? With this consoling reflection he gained courage to speak.

“Paulina,” said he, clearing his throat, which in spite of himself, gave forth a husky sound, “you quite misunderstand me, darling. If for a moment I was angry at your ideal abstraction, it was because my love is so vast, that it asks that in this hour of hours, you should think of me alone. Did I love you less fondly, I might, perchance be content, that the stars and the clouds should share with me your fitting thoughts, but as it is, out of the excess of my passion, I am jealous.”

So saying, he sought again to draw her gently to him, but the wounded fawn is timid of approach, and she drew back. Her tearful eyes alone answered the appeal.

There was silence until Neale again spoke.

“What is it, my Paulina will not forgive?”

“Ah, Neale,” she answered with a faltering voice, “I am not unforgiving, but I am hurt. Words wound like blows. ‘A mistake a second time in choosing a wife,’ you said. I know you were angry at me, and my

absurd, romantic illusions deserved rebuke; but *the dead*, Neale. How could you accuse the dead?"

"The dead, Paulina?" repeated he, "the grave has not claimed my first wife — she is dead to me, but she still lives — I am not widowed, sweet charmer, I am divorced."

As he reiterated this fact, being so intent to make once for all the unpleasant announcement, and thinking as usual, principally about himself, he scarcely noticed the deadly palor that overspread the beautiful face of his new wife, nor was he at all prepared for what ensued.

With what rude force had this iconoclast shattered the idol her fancy had worshiped! And now crashing through heart and brain, as if a living thunderbolt had destroyed the image, it was utterly swept away.

What a frightful revulsion of feeling! And who shall stay the flood gates, amid the torrent that rushes onward? It was as if heavy scales had fallen from blinded eyes, and she saw him with a true spiritual sense, *as he was*, stript of all charm. She did not cry, nor scream, nor faint, in this moment of extreme anguish, for in her soul raged a consuming fire that bade defiance to direst fate.

Shame, contempt, hatred, absolute loathing, usurped the place of love.

She was at heart a chaste, pure woman, whose love was not passion, but the embodiment of a sentiment for the beautiful, a reaching out for companionship, an in-

vestment of the object selected with heroic qualities and virtues—as a superior being, such as a true woman yearns to recognize as first in the world for her.

None of these, was the miserable man who had thus cruelly deceived her.

Instantly rising to her full height, and she was tall of stature, with flashing and dilated eyes, and commanding mien, in clear, almost ringing tones of scornful reproach, she upbraided this trifler.

“It was a brave and noble thing,” she said, “thus to betray, entrap and insnare a woman’s trust. I disdain to grieve, for I scorn you, Neale Voland. If for one short hour, nay, one hour of butterfly, senseless joy, I was yours, I am so no longer. For, so help me God, I would sooner be the bride of death, than fill the place that by right belongs to any living woman. You have misjudged your victim, sir, and more—if indeed, marriage is but that mere legal figment, that pure civil contract you would have it, if it has no abiding, inherent, essential virtue of permanency, it can be dissolved as readily for me as for you, and it shall be. I, too, will demand a divorce!”

So saying, and before he could fairly divine her intention, with the haughty air of an empress, she had left the room.

“Egad!” exclaimed the stunned man, “that was the most splendid piece of acting I have ever seen. That woman would make her fortune on the stage. By Jove, it was superb. I like her spirit, and, confound

the jade, I like Her a vast deal better than I did before."

As Neale Voland thus soliloquized, he walked up and down the room. "If I follow her just now," he continued, "it will spoil her. It is but a contest as to who shall rule. I will affect indifference. She is mine, and it is only a question of expediency."

Then, after a pause —

"She does not return—well, she is high-strung, and I quite put the filly on her mettle. By all that's sacred, rather a stormy wedding night! What would Miriam think of this sort of thing?—she, who is always so meek and obedient. But I will not let the lightning of this minx's wrath, and the tempest of her passions, overcome me. They may consume themselves, and her, too. Of course she dotes on a handsome fellow like me — a real lady-killer — an Adonis. She fancies I am still her suitor. That is a good joke. The game's up, and I've won her hand. Presently the silly creature will come to me — patience — well, thank fortune, we are in this out-of-the-way Lodge, where our troubles may harmlessly expend themselves, and no one the wiser."

At this moment, a slight rustling of the silken velvet *portière* caused him to turn, as Hermann, his valet, emerged into the room.

He was met by an angry glance, which the man seemed unconscious of, as with a deferential bow, he inquired :

“Are you pleased, sir, to require my services before you join madame in her apartment?”

“Sirrah, no,” growled the bridegroom, with a fierce scowl — “you will not again intrude upon my privacy, unless sent for.”

A polite bow was the sole response to this sharp rebuke ; but no sooner had Hermann left the room than he indulged in a little, triumphant chuckle, as the fellow pulled out of his pocket a minute note-book, filled with little dots :

“This is quite a profitable evening for me,” muttered he. “The entire conversation, that fine scene madame enacted, the interesting soliloquy of the Honorable President of the Terrapin Club,” are all carefully noted.

“Here is the material of at least two columns of society news — racy, too — and, considering the position of the parties, it ought to pay well. But, I must hasten to make up my letter, that it may be in time for that gossiping paper, ‘*The Eagle.*’ I’m half ashamed to publish my articles in it, it’s so miserably conducted. Aha! Won’t he be astounded when I call his attention to the article — headed ‘Marriage Extraordinary in High Life’ — and won’t the Club have a worrying time, on account of its president?” And thus this quasi reporter and stenographer, this faithful valet, served two masters.

“I don’t half like that fellow’s bow,” muttered Neale Volland, as he stretched himself full length on a

silken lounge. "He's too obsequious by half, and next time I'll kick him well, just to see him bend in earnest," and, as if pleased with the happy conceit, and yielding to the luxurious spring of the couch, he was soon lost in the sleep of presumable innocence and peace.

CHAPTER II.

NORA.

NORA sat in the bridal chamber awaiting the coming of her young mistress, and a quaint picture of a comely old Irishwoman, of the class of upper servants, was she.

She was attired in a bright plaid, blue and crimson merino gown, which was made exceedingly wide, and the short skirt gathered full upon a belt. This best dress had been scrupulously laid away these many years, although every spring house-cleaning it was reverently unwrapped, then, after being well shaken, folded back in the same creases, sprinkled with camphor gum, placed inside of an old linen pillow-case, and the pillow-case with its precious enclosure fastened in a stout brown paper bag, when it was once more consigned to its corner in the antiquated hair trunk, which Nora often declared was “intirely valeeless, be token of its bein’ a hairloom from the owld counthry.”

On this particular occasion, when the enshrined gown had been subjected to a minute and prolonged examination, by holding its various breadths well displayed against a strong light, it was clearly to be seen that the busy moth had not been idle, having penetrated

even into this guarded sanctuary, in spite of all the precautions taken against the enemy. To be sure, the first approaches had been somewhat cautious, for only little holes the size of pin heads threaded the texture of the garment. But Nora's indignation was excessive at the discovery—

“It's all the haythenish air of Americky makin' so free wid' me best duds. In the blissed isle of St. Pawthrick, no baste that flies, iver giv' me a haperth o' warri-mint.”

Some thin strands of white hair were combed so tightly back as to be scarcely visible, under the deep double ruffles of her high white cotton cap, while over her shoulders and pinned carefully across her chest was a spotless white kerchief. A huge white cross-barred muslin apron, which came down to the top of the hem of her gown, and reached nearly around her thin waist, vied with the cap and the kerchief, in the laundried skill displayed.

There she sat, bolt upright, on the very edge of a stiff, high-backed, carved chair, as if deprecating its use, or her own occupancy of the best bed-room, except when duly armed with broom and dust-brush, she would at stated intervals, only known to herself, invade this “spare chamber,” like some priestess of olden days, who perform certain rites of exorcism, needed to dissipate the pall-like obscurity which disuse always spreads over the trappings of earth.

It was evident that Nora was not pleased, unless, in-

deed, she experienced a subdued joy, that there really existed good reason for grumbling.

“Faix, an’ I’ll be blissed, ef iver the loikes of sich a weddin’ was seen. An’ shure it’s not even a dacint wake, nor it is. It’s larnin mad, she is, poor child. She proves by her ways, what a bringin’ up that fashun-plate of a bordin’-school guv’ her. Them tachers, is ‘reg’lar tinkers at their trade, an’ I’d rayther she’d be iddicated at the Lodge to be shure. An’ she’s a purty colleen, she is — But whist, and look out for the loikes of him, wid all his foine airs, he’s the age on him, to be the fayther ‘uv her, an’ that good-for-nothin’ spalpeen of a Walley; shure an’ *he* shows the kind he is, at the ind of his upturned nose. The bad drop’s too avidint in his puckered nose. An’ does he think to walk in here, all of a suddint, an’ make fools of people? An’ he might go knee-deep in mud afore I’d be the wan to guv’ help. He’s a nuisance, an’ he can’t tache me manners, for didened I put up my good time twelve year, waitin’ on the nobility of Ireland. When I wore my blue aprons checked, an’ my green aprons checked, and did sarvice in a moral family. I’m jist as handy at makin’ up of beds as I was twinty years ago, but I’ll guv’ up the place, nor she puts sich over me, for I’m double bether nor he.”

The big low room, was but dimly lighted by two waxen candles in the sconce of the toilet glass, and Nora now rose to heap together the glowing embers, that cast strange shadowy shapes over the walls, so as to stir

their grotesque flicker into flame. As the old creature bent over the fire, she still crooned on:

“Bad omens in the coals, at a marhiage faste, the dancin’ lights should hop like a fizzgig, but fastival there’s none. All the signs is bad, her black dress, the dole day; I told her so. But she’s as wilful as the night she crawled up this werry chimbly, a wee chick of a thing, to see for hersell about Saint Nick. Wall, wall, she’s choosen Old Nick, and no Saint to fayther him, an’ I be not desaived.”

At this moment, Paulina, throwing open the door, hurriedly entered the room, and threw herself across the foot of the bed, with low, heart-broken sobs of anguish. Not a word was said, but the faithful Nora at once understood that her darling was in deep trouble, and as she knelt beside her, she too, broke forth into a moaning wail, expressive of deepest sympathy.

Then she removed the satin slippers and gently rubbed her feet within her thin, worn hands, and kissing them softly, whispered —

“Alanna pet, an’ is it a weddin’ nor a wake?”

Thus adjured, Paulina sat upon the side of the bed, threw her arms round her old nurse’s neck, and sobbed out.

“Save me, Nora. He has deceived me. He is a divorced man, and oh, Nora, *she* is not dead.”

At this, Nora flung her arms wildly round her darling and cried bitterly.

But after a time Paulina, as if determined to con-

quer her rebellious heart, made a brave effort to calm herself, and gently disengaging herself from the faithful creature, said :

“Nora, we must fly; and this very night. I will hide myself where he cannot find me, and never, never see him any more —”

“An’ where wull we go, pet,” she answered, “Och, an’ may the deevil fly away wid the miserable spalpeen, an’ he’s no widdy man afther all —”

“Oh, don’t Nora,” said Paulina, shuddering, “it was all my fault; my own foolish fault. I could kill myself to have been so foolish. But where shall we go? God knows.”

There was silence for a space, broken by Nora, who suddenly exclaimed, in the greatest excitement, as if an inspiration had seized her:

“Me an’ you, pet, must go to Fayther John, that baptized ye when ye was a purty babby an’ ye mither dead, an’ me the foster-mither as ye own fayther called me — an’ Fayther John will tell us the right an’ the wrong of it —”

“Father John, who baptized me, Nora,” exclaimed Paulina in the greatest astonishment, “why, Nora, what do you mean?”

“Wull, wull, me pet,” said Nora, shaking her head, “it’s a long story to be shure, but misery loves the strange bed-fellow, an’ many’s the time I wanted to tell ye, me darlint, an’ niver the heart I had. But, to make a clane breast of it, it was jist in the way of God’s pro-

vidence, an' it didened happen at all, at all. It was a blusterin' mornin' an' clouded like rain, an' I was goin' to communion, an' I stopped on me way to church to see Margaret Maguire an' tell her of me babby, an' wish her the top of the mornin'.

“‘Nora,’ says she, ‘shure, ye’re not going to mass this dark mornin’ widout takin’ a rumbril, wid ye?’ ‘Indade, I am,’ says I, ‘an’ not a hair I care for the clouds; shure, the rain could niver affect me none, dear.’

“‘Take my silk rumbril, Nora,’ says she, ‘it belonged to me darter that died, an’ her old man was a lokymotive car-tender, so be keerful wid it.’

“‘God bless ye an’ care ye, Margaret,’ says I, ‘an’ I’ll make bowld to take it, an’ I woudden lave it from me,’ says I.

“‘Where would you lave it, Nora?’ said she. ‘God send ye wit,’ says I. ‘I’d take it for’art to the altar rail, anninst me breast under me arrum, an’ forninst the middle aisle.’

“‘Then take it, Nora,’ says she, ‘an’ mine ye care it.’

“‘So off I skitted wid the silk rumbril, an’ whin I reached St. Pawthrick’s, the throng that was there would a scar’t ye. An’ I said to a thin, spare-faced woman, says I, ‘plaze mem, would ye care this silk rumbril while I go for’art to the altar rail?’

“‘She niver said a word, but took it, an’ put it atween me an’ her, restin’ agin the wall, canny enough,

along wid her own blue cotton one. 'Will ye care that now, plaze mem?' says I, seein' at the time a strange-lookin' woman next her, wid three rumbrils under her arrum. An She I mistrusted.

"So sayin' I wint for'art to the altar rail. Whin I come back I looked for the rumbril, an' blist but it was gone!

"'Where's me rumbril mem?' says I; 'will ye be plazed to hand it to me?' 'I don't know' says she, 'where it wint to.'

"'Blast ye,' says I, 'an' I as't ye to moind it.'

"'An who made me ye rumbril tender?' says she, scornful loike.

"Then I skitted from seat to seat, an I as't won an' anither, up an' down the aisles, till I war starved lookin' for it; whin all of a suddint I spied stannin' agin' the wall a bran noo rumbril. 'Heavin be thank't' says I, 'an' I can't find mine I'll take to this one.' So up I boned and took it. Jist thin, Jimmy, the sexton, looked at me hard, an' I lift the church. I didened go back to Margaret Maguire's for that day, for I knowed me babby would be worritin' for me, an' me time war up. An' I hurried back to me purty babby. That was ye, me pet.

"But the rumbril stuck to me sowl, and worked me conscience, an' wouden't let me rist, an' I took ye, that was me babby, in me arrums an' wint back to the church.

"Now Fayther John was stannin' at the door of the

sacristy as I wint by, an' seein' me comin' two steps towards him, he thought I wanted to buy somethin' at the fair, that was goin' on in the basemint; and 'Nora' says he, 'what do ye want to buy?' 'I'll buy nothin' yer rivrinced,' says I, 'nor more than its tin cints for a raffle chance of that velvet bonnet,' says I, 'but plaze yer rivrinced, I've got this silk rumbril to guv back, for it's stickin' to me sowl, it is.' Thin I told his rivrinced the story how they took from me in the church, an' in the holy time too, the rumbril that belonged to the sowl that's gone, an' she more by token the wife of the railroad car conductor. An' his rivrinced says:

“‘Lave the rumbril wid the sexton, an' he'll furrin out the ruffin that's stole your'n'—But he nivir did, for the rumbril's past recovery and gone now, to this day twinty years, pet.—But the Lord would have it so, for when Fayther John, looked at ye, me babby, he said—

“‘That's a foine child, Nora.’

“‘More, by token, yer rivrinced,' says I, 'she's a purty colleen, for a haythen.’

“‘A haythen!' says Father John, 'poor thing! poor thing! you don't say she's not baptized?’

“‘An' he took ye in his arrum's, an' ye put ye little arrum round his neck, an' coo like a dove — an' he dropt a tear on ye little head, as I told him, how ye mither's dead, an' ye fayther too busy to mind much o' ye —

“‘An' whin I see the tear glistenin' on ye little head, I said —

“ ‘Fayther John, guv’ her the waters of baptism, an’ her passport to heaven.’

“ And he held ye in his arrums as if a thinkin’ an’ prayin’, whin he says —

“ ‘I’ll not refuse her the gates of Paradise ;’ an’ he took ye to the font, an’ I stood as ye God-mither, pet, an’ he baptized ye Paulina Mary, an’ it was all the providence of that silk rumbril, me pet — so don’t be angry wid yer poor Nora.”

During this interminable, rambling narration, Paulina listened listlessly, as one might to the monotonous ticking of a family clock. When Nora had at last made her confession, and informed her of the remarkable fact that she had not only been baptized by a Catholic priest, but that she was in addition the God-daughter of her old nurse, Nora, Paulina was actually relieved, such was her despairing state of mind, to find that there was a nearer tie than she had imagined, that bound her to the faithful creature at her side. Doubtless, under other circumstances, she would have received this information with no little displeasure, even in its absurd setting.

But now it was otherwise, for she only replied : “ Be quiet a little, Nora, and let me think.”

“ It is bether to think, me pet,” said Nora, “ wid the feet warrum agin’ the fire, so as the heat strikes innards on the intelleck.” So saying, she wheeled an arm-chair, placing it in position so that Paulina could be comfortable, then leading her to its cushioned depths,

she seated herself quite out of sight, in a remote corner of the room, first closing the door, which in Paulina's hurried entrance had been left ajar. This delicate appreciation of Paulina's needs was beyond any grace borrowed from cultivation, and was the spontaneous outpouring of the humble creature's heart.

True affection has always, in all conditions of life, intuitions, that, when trouble comes, brings the rich and the poor, the high born and the lowly, the ignorant and the educated, into sympathetic relations.

As Paulina sank back into the luxurious fauteuil, she was insensibly somewhat tranquilized, as Nora knew she would be, by the cheering warmth diffused, and the roseate light of the glowing embers. She tried to calm the wild throbbings of her heart and ask herself what was wisest to do. "Wisdom," she muttered, "its uses, are past for me. Mine was a fool's leap in the dark. Be still, my heart — I hate the man who has so cruelly deceived me. I would fly to the uttermost parts of the earth to escape him. To live with *him*, would be a living death; but my head aches, I cannot think, I am tossed about by the swirl of the tempest. I cannot see my way, I cannot reason, and who will advise me in this instant need of action? Alas, I know not. My good guardian is in Europe. I have no friends — I am but a lonely, wrecked, orphan girl" — and bowing her head, she wept.

Nora had remained very still till now, but she could not bear to hear those sad, low sobs, and she went to her mistress and knelt beside her.

“Nora’s here,” she said, “to do her pet’s badden. The trunk’s all packed for the vy’age, an’ we can jist skit off bether widout him nor wid him. Nor wu’d I be thinkin’ long afther him, the spalpeen.”

“My good Nora,” said Paulina, “we will go in the morning, and take counsel of Father John. When we leave here, it will be an easy matter to direct about the luggage.”

“An’ now the Lord be praised an’ all His saints, an’ Mathoo, Mark, Luke, an’ John, an’ blissing’s on ye purty livil head, an’ God be thank’t for that Providence of the rumbril that’s gone past recovery, now these twinty years,” exclaimed Nora all in one breath. Once decided, Paulina became more composed, and Nora soon busied herself in the immediate preparations for their probable departure.

But first of all she stepped out quietly, to inform herself as to the movements of the enemy, as a sort of reconnoissance on the eve of battle.

She had the advantage of knowing her ground well, and she presently got a glimpse, without being herself seen, of the valet, who was busy writing. Casting a glance of ineffable disdain upon *him*, she then stole on tip-toe to the drawing room, and from within the heavy folds of the velvet *portière*, she beheld with amazement, the bridegroom fast asleep on the silken lounge.

She was not displeased that he was sleeping, but her indignation to see his boots carelessly defacing that immaculate piece of furniture knew no bounds.

“Faix, an’ it racks me nervous system intirely, the loikes of that in this house, an’ the fayther of her, God rist his sowl, he’s dead now and in the clay, he’d nivir took his naps on the sofy, leastwise wid his brogans on loike a brackish boor. But this one means to put a disrespeck on the house, an’ I could wop the mug off him, so I could, an’ he, slaypin, so innocent, he the gay dasaver, an’ me purty babby jist kilt wid the heart-break he’s guv’ her.”

If at this moment Neale Voland had opened his closed eyes he would have seen extended towards him a bared, wrinkled arm, and a shriveled, closed up fist, shaken in a menacing way, within an inch of his classic nose, for with a momentary and almost insane impulse, Nora had made a rush at him, but retreated, remembering her darling, just as he turned somewhat uneasily on his narrow couch.

“Slape on, ye’ gay Laferio,” she grumbled, “whin the last trump blows ye’ll be wan to skit wid de goats to the lift. Nora will do ye no harrum, but lave ye to His providence.”

Truly, the seared conscience rests easy, it is the living soul of innocence that grieves.

During the long watches of that night, Paulina remained immovable, nor was she conscious of the flight of time.

The hall clock struck the midnight hour, and that eventful day which should have found her a happy bride, but which had brought to her so much misery,

had dropped into the dark abyss of the past, and ushered to her a darkened future.

In the summing up of a lifetime, how few hours after all are of supreme importance, or have ever been given to serious thoughts. The most of mankind literally live only from hour to hour, not thinking of the past, and caring still less for the future.

The physical needs, the demands of the senses, external conditions, dominate. He alone, has lived to some purpose, who has been forced to self-examination.

Paulina commenced to question herself, and to realize that she had now entered upon a very serious phase of existence.

The lightheartedness, the impulsiveness, the sentimentalism of an unchecked and unchecked girlhood, were now tried in the purifying alembic of affliction.

The copious tears shed that night fell like the waters distilled from out the opening masses of dark clouds, in pure and vivifying graces upon the parched soul.

She resolved to begin life anew, and for the first time, the incense of prayer arose in her hitherto arid spirit, and she asked for light to know, and strength to do, what was right.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER JOHN.

FATHER JOHN TYRCONNELL had said his five o'clock mass at old St. Patrick's, and the elect few out of his large congregation who always assisted, rain or shine all the year round, at the holy sacrifice, were still on their knees in the cold church, meditating upon the wonderful mysteries of their faith, and the priest was making his thanksgiving, when two women alighted from a handsome carriage, and hurriedly entered the church by one of the side doors.

The younger was tall, but of a slight figure and graceful bearing. She was closely veiled, and warmly wrapped in a long fur-lined silk cloak, for a November morning is apt to be chill and damp.

The elder person was thin, somewhat bent, and wore the inevitable red cross-barred blanket shawl, quilted black silk hood, long, full apron, and blue stuff gown, of the Irishwomen of her class. She led the way, as one familiar with the place, for where do the poor feel so much *at home*, as in their Father's house, within whose portals He ever rests to await their coming.

Making as free use of the holy water that filled a marble font as if performing an ablution, and well

sprinkling her companion, evidently considering her in need of abundant exorcisms, she then motioned her to the nearest seat, and making a deep genuflection took a place at her side.

Presently the priest rose from his *prie-Dieu*, and leaving the sanctuary, passed down the main aisle to the door.

Then Nora, for she it was, hastily followed, and they met just outside on the church steps. Paulina accompanied her.

“Fayther John, the top of the mornin’ to yer riv’rince,” said Nora, curtsying low. “This leddy hereby, wud fain spake to ye, an’ she be none ither yer riv’rince, than ye own blissed babby of twinty years agone. A shape in the fold, she is, Fayther, at this ilivinth hour.”

There was a merry twinkle in Father John’s mild blue eye, as thus quaintly introduced he bowed to Paulina, taking in at once the full meaning of Nora’s dialect.

“Pray Miss,” said he, “accompany Nora, and come with me into the sacristy, out of this raw, blustering air;” and so saying, he led the way, descending the stone steps, and walked rapidly along the side of the long building to the rear end, where the sacristy was built as a small adjunct to the main edifice.

Opening the door of this room, Father John bade them enter with a hearty manner that gave full welcome.

There was no hint to them that he was fasting and needed to be refreshed, for the priest was never in the habit of thinking of himself at all, and he was ever ready to attend to the wants of others.

These needs, amid a large congregation of poor people who had a hand to hand unceasing struggle for the privilege of living, were never ending. To minister unto these children of his Father, he must also bear a daily cross, and the spirit of sacrifice with the practice of self-denial, formed the rule of his life. This occasion was therefore of daily occurrence. His name indicated his lineage, but he was a native born American of Irish descent. He was thus peculiarly fitted for his charge, for although with the inherited wit of his Irish blood, he quite understood his people; yet he was himself intensely American, an ardent patriot and admirer of our free institutions.

This combination made him a very safe guide in times of popular turbulence such as ours. He was rather stoutly built and not ascetic in appearance, having a florid complexion. Indeed, the deep tinge of color, his quick speech and nervous movements, indicated energy and strength of character.

His voice was very vibrating and resonant, and his open, smooth forehead, unfurrowed by wrinkles, although his thick shock of unruly hair was tinged with gray, denoted peace of mind and a benevolent disposition.

But that magnetic charm that made all hearts re-

spond when he appealed, dwelt in the flexible tones of his sympathetic voice, which the moment Paulina heard, won her confidence.

It was never precisely what he said, but the manner of saying it, that made his utterances fall upon the hearts of his hearers with such telling force.

As they entered the sacristy, Nora's hitherto pent up feelings culminated, as the drama of the umbrella which had terminated in this very spot, by Paulina's baptism, all came before her with the vivid power with which this impressionable race recall scenes that have taken any hold upon their fancy.

She burst forth into fervent ejaculations:

“Blissed be the providence, an' me, an' he, an' she, agin here an' it, alone astray,” indicating, that if the aforesaid “it,” namely the lost umbrella, would only walk in and take its place, the *dramatis personæ* of the play would all be there.

But as Paulina stood there, she, too, was strangely moved at that overruling destiny, that once more after an interval of a score of years placed her in this very room, one of the very same group of which she had before been the central object.

Interrupting the course of the woman's incoherent exclamations, she said, with feeling:

“Nora tells me, sir, that twenty years ago you took me, a motherless babe, out of her arms, and baptized me Paulina Mary.”

“Is it possible that, after this score of years, you re-

turn to the fold, which you then entered?" replied the priest much moved. "If so, thanks be to the dear Lord and his Blessed Mother for this grace. I was then but young, myself, and my heart was touched at your infantile helplessness, when I yielded to the impulse that stirred within me, as well as to Nora's entreaties, and I gave you the holy, regenerating rite."

As these joyous, earnest words thrilled through Paulina's heart, she could not but experience a regret, that she must disappoint these expectations; and as the real object of the visit now confronted her, she shrank back appalled, as if some huge kraken had suddenly arisen out of the mists of ages, to destroy all the bright promise of her youth.

"I grieve, sir," she sadly answered, "that the object of my visit cannot confirm your hopes in my regard. But I am led here, by an impulse I can neither define nor control, to tell you the weary story of the mistake of a life, and to take counsel of your wisdom."

Then Paulina made a sort of general confession, commencing with the recital of the wilful moods of her childhood, describing the unrestrained impulses of her girlhood, and ending with this bitter experience of an early womanhood.

Had she stopped to analyze her motives, to ask herself, why she should unravel the course of her life to this stranger, she would have found it impossible to give any satisfactory explanation of her own act. She was not a Catholic, and the gift of faith had not illumi-

nated her soul, so why should she seek to be influenced by this man, who had rather, according to her own views of things, done her a wrong ?

The answer may be found when we can more fully understand how much of the warp and woof of life, how far the network that surrounds us, and within which we move onward, is worked out for us, and to what extent we create for ourselves a destiny.

This is a fine point and a mystery, within which is hidden the riddle of one's very existence.

Some shallow minds define it as fate, and rest upon the mere nothing of an unmeaning word; others who read with deeper insight, the import of the ever-shifting scene, recognize a higher power.

During this long narrative, Father John never interrupted, by a single word or comment, the thread of the story; but as it progressed, his expressive countenance indicated that he perfectly measured the nature thus portrayed.

It was clear that he understood Paulina, and she felt that he did so, and would be able to judge wisely the case laid before him. As she proceeded, his face grew very grave and sorrowful, and when, at last, the dark shadow cast athwart the opening bloom of youth was made manifest, he was filled with pity for her misfortune.

“ Ah,” sighed he, as if to himself “ it is but one phase, ever recurring, of the evils growing out of the fatal liberty of divorce. This hydra-headed monster takes on

all shapes, this canker worm must sooner or later destroy the integrity of society, and lead our civilization to its decline."

"Dear sir," said Paulina, "I cannot say that I am affected with religious scruples on the subject of divorce. I had never, indeed, given the matter any attention, until suddenly it was brought home to me with such terrible force.

"I was, as it were, transported beyond the realities of life, by the indulgence of my own idealisms; so that the man whose wife I promised to become was uplifted, in my heated imagination, to a sort of demi-god.

"When I too late discovered, although in the very flush of my exaltation, that I had been deceived, the reaction was in proportion to my over-wrought state of mind. My hero was not only dethroned, but he whom I had invested with all virtues, inspired me with absolute dislike. In addition, my whole nature revolts against the miserable situation in which I am unexpectedly placed, for I find myself, as if I were the inmate of an Eastern harem, but the successor of another woman who is still living.

"The spirituality of my marriage is thus destroyed, and that innate delicacy of sentiment, which would have formed my highest happiness, is outraged. I am so constituted that I could not endure the existence of such relations. The continuance of this manner of life would kill me."

"I can well comprehend," replied Father John,

“that the exceeding delicacy, which is at once the glory and the charm of a refined woman’s nature, has been shocked in your case, but yet, I do not exactly understand why it is that you come to me in your distress. In what way, poor child, can I be of service to you?”

As he asked this question, there was a wistful, pathetic tone in the clear cadence of that voice.

“I hope, dear Father,” answered Paulina (forgetful, under that magnetic power, that she had intended only to address him as Sir), “to receive from you some satisfactory answer where my own ignorance is cruelly perplexing. I cannot, for instance, in view of having made my marriage vows under an entire misapprehension of the true situation of my spouse, decide as to whether I am married or not married.”

“My child,” replied he, “I am not a learned casuist, skilled in ethics, who may be appealed to for the elucidation of a mooted point, and, curiously enough, the question that has arisen in your mind, involves some of the nicest subtleties of the schools.

“Personally, I can have no private opinion on these subjects. But fortunately, the Catholic church, whose humble minister I am, has defined certain rules, which enable us to decide. She has raised marriage, in obedience to the mandate of Jesus Christ, to the dignity of a sacrament.

“It is first of all, an indissoluble union, contracted by mutual consent; and this indissolubility arises not only

from the nature of the tie, but from the express law of Almighty God.

“By the divine law this sacred bond must subsist in full force, and cannot be dissolved, *with liberty of re-marriage*, by any human law or other authority, while both the parties remain in life.

“Then marriage may also be considered as a natural contract, and God Himself so ordained it, since He created both the sexes on purpose to be united to each other. Moreover, marriage is also a civil contract, to be made according to the laws of the country where the parties dwell, so that order and peace may be firmly established throughout the land; but this civil contract, in the order of things, should always be regulated by a higher law, and in submission to its decrees. Whenever this happy union of the divine and human law exists, laws doubly guarding the integrity of marriage, the peace, virtue and security of society, are held intact, and untold evils prevented.

“In your sad case, my poor child, judged by these rules, I do not hesitate to say that you would commit a grievous sin to live with this man as his wife. Thank God the refinement of your nature, your subtle perception, and the sensitiveness of your feelings have saved you from the consummation of such a contract.

“According to the divine law you are free, for the church has established the cases where nullity may be said to exist; and your union may be so defined, for by the canon law, these causes which concern the validity

of marriage, properly belong to the ecclesiastical judges. Still, as you have entered into this union in the light of a civil contract, in order to free yourself from this obligation, you must seek the redress of the civil law. In fact, my child, it is your duty to use all diligence in obtaining your freedom. You are bound to remain persistently separated from this man, whatever may be the result of your efforts to secure a legal divorce.

“As to the metaphysical question involved of an implied coercion of the will, in consequence of a misapprehension on your part, I am inclined to think that this error of yours, other conditions being admissible, will not free you from the obligations you have contracted. Your will was not forced; there existed no absolute physical coercion, nor moral violence by open, absolute falsehood. On the other hand, you were not free from blame, you were precipitate, very rash, and did not exercise discreet judgment, such as the importance of the act demanded. While it is true that you were deceived, and I can understand that you must naturally refuse your respect and affection to one who would allow you to infer what was not true, in order to take advantage of your mistake to obtain you as his, yet a mere misapprehension, however distasteful, cannot be said to constitute just cause for nullity.”

Father John paused. He had spoken plainly, naught extenuating. Paulina recognized, that on the mere casuistry of a misconception, she could not expect

to demand the abrogation of her promise. But, like the majority of those who seek advice, she was not prepared to change her views.

“I find,” she said, “this marriage so hateful, that I have thought not to return to my home, never to meet my so-called husband again, and in fact to fly to some secret place, and,” she added bursting into tears, “in the hope to forever live secluded and secure from being harassed by his presence.”

“Allow me once more to advise you,” said Father John, “and to beg you to do none of these things. You are at present in too excited a state of mind to act with due discretion. Unfortunately, the mistake you have already made may, in spite of all you can do, exercise a disastrous influence over your future life. It is impossible, humanly speaking, to predict the result; but whatever course you may pursue, I entreat you to act openly and above board. Return home, ask for an interview which can be a final one, and in the presence of good Nora here, announce to this man that you intend to seek a legal dissolution of the civil contract. After this, you can openly consult lawyers as to the proper measures to be taken. I am not an expounder of human law and must leave you to consult legal advisers; but do not forget, my child, that in all Christian nations the divine law should be held paramount, that in fact it is so throughout the universe, whether so recognized or not, and if you are guided by this light, you will be safe.”

“Good-bye, Father,” said Paulina, weeping; “pray

that I may have the moral courage to act according to my convictions.”

As Paulina and Nora re-entered their carriage, and were driven rapidly homeward, Father John, forgetting that he had not broken his fast since the night before, again sought the sanctuary, where he was soon absorbed in prayer.

Now Nora was, after all, much disappointed with the final result of this interview, which she had so rejoiced to have brought about. She had, without knowing it, built up in her imagination the pleasing excitement of a hurried flight with her young mistress; and had she not even dreamed all about it? The faithful Sancho Panza was not more ready than was she to share all the extraordinary hazards, that might arise out of any desperate adventure into which her female Don Quixote might be plunged.

Every woman, be she young or old, comely or homely, ignorant or learned, impassive or impulsive, has hidden away in the depths of her nature a leaven of idealism. This working-day world of ours has everywhere its Marthas, who may be kept in strict repression by an infinitude of unceasing cares, nor does the wear and tear of daily toil, that holds them in the narrow circle of their duties, leave time for fanciful speculations. But, if by any happy chance these conditions change, they are ever ready at once to indulge in extravagant hopes, expectations and plans, such as would previously have surprised themselves.

Although the domestic life of woman may limit her sphere of action, yet she seems ever ready to take higher flight, and accept as probable, what man would be inclined to reject as unreal or impossible.

During the past night, Nora's few hours of sleep had been filled with the wildest dreams, which were so vivid as to mix themselves up with her waking thoughts in inextricable confusion. As is often the case with ignorant people, she attached special importance to these dreams as foretelling the future. Some way she felt sure that Father John would give advice that would confirm these dreams and make them come true.

Yet, here they were, going back to the same place, and, as it seemed to her, to pick up the tangled threads and straighten them out quietly without violent change. What with her reverence for Father John, and her exasperation at his advice, she was sore perplexed.

“Wait till the turn of the day me pet,” she gravely said, shaking her head, wise as an owl, “an’ it wull all come right in time, leastwise there’s no vartue in drames— an’ drames, me pet, is to be deemed weighty; an’ by token of me drames, I made shure of a vy’age— for did I not drame an’ wid wan eye see meself, pet, an’ ye too, a sailin’ away forninst the owld counthry. An’ as the lan’ was laving us, I see that witless Walley makin’ signs at me an’ you, to take him overboard. ‘Indade, and we wull not,’ I shouted; ‘an’ ar ye too owld intirely, nor is it too proud ye are, that ye must travil for a livin.’ An’ wid me wan slapein’ eye, I see that spalpeen of a

Wally, jist spin roun' an' roun', he was that mad to be lift. An' I spake at him from over the waste of wathers. 'Humph,' says I, 'are ye a gintlemon brid an' born to be trated wid sich considerashun.'

"Thin he cried out, 'Foolish ooman, at the ind, whin ye misthress nades me, out of this I'll spake the gude word for her.' An' thin he hild anninst me-eyes, a paper full of dots, whin me an ye, pet" —

"For heaven's sake, be quiet, Nora," interrupted Paulina. "Is this a time to be telling me about your senseless dreams, that mean nothing?"

"Och, me pet, but drames *is* weighty," repeated Nora, relapsing into a silence which was not again broken.

CHAPTER IV.

SEPARATION.

“**A**BSOLUTELY a new, uncomfortable sensation, my first sunrise,” soliloquized Neale Volland, as he stood in the bay window of the drawing-room, with his hands folded behind him, gazing listlessly at the sky, with a sort of critical look, as if he might be but a transient visitor from some other planet.

Long stretches of thin, light, curling clouds, so delicately penciled across the faint blue of the horizon, so varying in shape, some, like shadowy, trailing tresses of maiden’s wraiths, swept sailing by, on into illimitable space ; while others, of tangled, fibrous forms, frowned down like matted Gorgon heads ; and above all, beyond the fogs of earth, rose-tinged hues were softly blended with the infinite depths of the higher heavens. The dark curtain of night-cloud lifted slowly this dull November morning, and the creeping mists that had hung over the earth during the night, were scarcely dissipated by the obscured beams of the sun.

The picture presented by the Great Artist was not approved of by the blasé society man. He turned contemptuously away with a sneer, for it is not “good form” ever to be enthused. “*Nil admirari*,” is the motto of fashionable society.

“I’d rather see ghosts at midnight, that is, if they were pretty,” said he, disdainfully, “than this leaden sunrise.

“‘I find this scene that poets sing,
Is but a dismal, blasted thing—’”

“My master is pleased to be poetical on his bridal morn,” suggested his valet, who that moment appeared, with a cringing manner, that seemed to deprecate any pointed force his words might convey.

“And who the devil asked *your* opinion?” retorted the master angrily. “A literary varlet is by all odds a product of the nineteenth century;” and, he added with a jeer, “the next sensation provided for the public will be a news column headed, “Original notes by a sentimental valet.”

The man bowed low, so low that the snarling curve of the mouth was not noticeable:—

“Truth, sir,” observed he very softly, “is said to be stranger than fiction.”

“Aphorisms, egad!” exclaimed the master. “This thing grows tiresome. I vastly prefer a parrot to a conversational servant. Why are you here at all?”

“Did you not ring, sir?”

“True, true; why didn’t you come sooner — why not at once?”

“I was at the porte-cochère, in attendance on madame.”

“I don’t quite understand you,” said Neale Volland, flushing just a little in spite of his effort to look

unconcerned. "Don't dare to speak in riddles to me."

"I have told the exact truth sir," answered he.

"Well, fellow, go on."

"What do you wish to know sir?" inquired he.

"You are a booby; where was madame going?"

"I did not ask her sir. She drove off without deigning to notice me."

"In what direction did she go?"

"I did not note the point of compass, sir."

"Damn you!" thundered Neale, forgetting at the moment that a gentleman never swears, "do you take me for a grand inquisitor, and compel me to extort a statement from you inch by inch?"

"All I know sir," said the man coolly, "is that madame drove off in her clarence with Nora, and it may be fifteen minutes now since they have gone."

Neale Volland sat down for a moment, as if to concentrate his thoughts; then he said, in a business way, "Hermann, go at once to the office of *The Eagle*. Ask them not to insert the announcement of my marriage sent them yesterday for publication this morning. Here is a ten dollar bill to pay for the space which was to have been used. But, at whatever cost, insist on the notice being withdrawn. Take my coupé, so as to go with speed, and, above all, lose no time. You can, if you drive rapidly, reach town in twenty minutes."

The valet at once disappeared, but scarcely quickly enough to hide the broad grin on his face.

“I fancy that fellow dared to smile, but he would not surely venture that far, with me,” muttered his employer.

Scarcely was he certain of being alone, than all his assumed indifference gave way to the most uncontrollable rage. He made immense strides up and down the apartment, gesticulating wildly and calling down the most frightful imprecations on all women, and in especial on Miriam, his divorced wife, for continuing to live, seeing how much she was in his way, and then on Paulina, upon whose devoted head he vowed direst vengeance.

But as this fury somewhat spent itself, he found consolation in the fact that, at all events, the marriage of last evening had been kept in a manner secret, and that he would continue to hold back the announcement until he could carry out his original programme, bring his recreant bride to terms, establish her as the mistress of his fine town house, and introduce her properly to an admiring world.

Then came the stunning reflection, all too late, that she must have fled, and with it, the tantalizing question, whither?

“Fool that I was,” hissed he, “thus to misjudge her. I thought that she was so in love with me that she would before now have sought my presence. I like her pride full well, for it gives a zest to success. Of course she loves me, why else did she marry me. She is her own mistress and wealthy, and she seemed infatuated. I am always a social success, and

why should I be baffled now? It is too absurd that I should be even uneasy, for is she not mine? It is only a question of time. She did say she would ask for a divorce. That looks ugly, for a divorce, as we all know, is an easy thing to procure, and she is young, clever and beautiful, and the world moves on easy hinges to such. I should have wooed her abjectly, for beauty requires the homage of slaves. Yes, it must have been a shock to her pride to hear of my poor Miriam, and she does not know even the beginning. If she did—ugh! she *might* hate me, handsome fellow as I am, debonair, and received everywhere.”

These and many similar reflections filled up the measure of an hour, at the expiration of which Hermann returned and reported that he had caused the withdrawal of the marriage announcement, sent by his master.

“Capital,” said Neale aloud, rubbing his hands. “The silver lining to the cloud appears, and now the world cannot sneer at us, and time is all that is needed.”

“I have brought a copy of the paper with me, sir; would you care to see it?” So saying, the valet handed the journal folded in such a way, that a heading in extra large type at once caught his master’s eye:

MARRIAGE EXTRAORDINARY IN HIGH LIFE.

Mr. Neale Voland, the accomplished president of the Terrapin Club, and brilliant social leader, whose very recent divorce from an interesting lady (who at one time some years ago presided over his elegant establish-

ment) caused so much surprise, has again led to the hymeneal altar the wealthy and beautiful heiress of Hazlehurst, Miss Paulina Peyton. It is said that this marriage is attended with some circumstances of very romantic interest. The ceremony was performed at dusk last evening, at Hazlehurst, the residence of the bride, in the presence of only two witnesses. The bride was in mourning, it is hinted, out of respect to the memory of the late departed. We are sorry to have to intimate the existence of a painful rumor, which we simply give for what it is worth, that a virtual separation took place immediately succeeding the marriage, and that probably a divorce will soon be instituted, which promises to become *une cause célèbre*, and in the course of which some extraordinary developments may be expected. May we be pardoned, if we express the hope, that if this second venture on the sea of matrimony proves infelicitous, so excellent a gentleman may still find that domestic bliss he is so peculiarly fitted to enjoy, in any future alliances he may contract.

As Neale Voland read this choice bit of gossip, so barbed with malice, so replete with insolent suggestion, and yet with its gossamer web of truth so skillfully interwoven throughout its lines, as to make it difficult of contradiction, deep as his sin had been, the punishment was commensurate.

The satisfaction which his amiable valet experienced as he watched his master's varying countenance under the infliction, may be well compared to that of the dexterous spider that has ensnared its prey, pierced it with its fang, instilled the poisonous liquid, and then serenely observes its convulsions of pain.

“This is an infamous libel,” muttered Neale Voland, crushing the paper in his hands, with a strong grip that meant more than words. “The society reporter is ubiquitous. He sees much, invents more, and an insatiate public believes everything. Nor can any man find adequate redress when his private affairs are outrageously ventilated, because the very grievance is by its own nature in the publicity attached.”

Neale Voland quite overlooked, in making these angry comments, that this very publicity he complained of, was a salutary check to evil doers. Yet the appalling fact remained, and he clearly recognized it, that there was a society reporter of a leading journal who had an intimate knowledge, however obtained, of his movements, and was ready to make his information public. His perplexity on this point was so great, that for the moment it overcame all personal feelings. But in the midst of these vague and tantalizing speculations, the idea of a household spy never for a moment presented itself to his imagination. And it was well for the lingering valet, who seemed so anxious to express his concern, that it did not. Yet an astute man of the world, once aroused and on his guard, was a dangerous enemy to deal with. One thing was certain, amid the perplexity of so many confusing emotions, and that was: the necessity of propitiating Paulina, at whatever cost.

He tried to console himself too, by reflecting that his marriage was a splendid one; and when his shrew was tamed, she would preside magnificently over his fine

town house. This is a superb country seat, he thought, and the ample means of my bride added, will make my own more modest income equal to any society demands.

Then it is an easy thing, when one has a splendid establishment in town and country, to frown down, yes, to stamp out (and involuntarily he suited the action to the word) all who dare gossip about one in any disagreeable way.

At this moment, oppressed by the conflicting tumult of feeling, he strode to a window and threw it open, as if to gain new courage from the fresh air, when he caught a glimpse of Paulina's carriage just entering the long avenue of trees that led to the mansion.

Transported with delight, for every reason, at such an unlooked-for boon as this speedy return, and determined to force a reconciliation by the most persistent suit, he rushed into the hall with the utmost precipitation, to open the door himself, and receive his recreant fugitive.

At the instant, therefore, Paulina found herself in his arms, and not only very tenderly lifted from her carriage, but actually carried up the steps into the drawing-room, where she was placed very gently, and with an air of deference, on a sofa.

“My darling must pardon,” said he, “the ecstasy of a disconsolate lover who has mourned the loss, for even a few hours, of the adored mistress of his heart. Hours, did I say, sweetest? Ages, endless cycles seem to have run their course.”

Poor Paulina! She was prepared to meet an icy avalanche of reproaches. She had fully expected, almost hoped for, a most stormy scene when they should meet; for she had decided to have one final interview and leave-taking.

But she intended to arrange this one last meeting in a formal way; to have Nora duly posted as a witness, and then, like some tragedy queen who is sustained by the force of heroic resolve, she would dictate her own terms, and bid this unworthy man an everlasting farewell.

Yet, here she was, in the twinkling of an eye, lifted off her obstinate little feet, her very breath taken away by the sudden outburst of this sweet violence, which treated her just as if she might be any other woman, to be made love to as best it pleased an ardent lover.

And he did look handsome and chivalrous, too, as he stood before her, with a half-bold, half-respectful air, as if he awaited some responsive tenderness, half sure it would be given, yet half afraid it might be denied.

As she caught his impassioned, admiring gaze, she felt a thrill of that magnetism that had at first enthralled her will, and she feared that if she hesitated she would be enslaved.

Now Paulina had singular force of will; and although she was, as we have seen, idealistic, and even what society would consider romantic, yet she was not at all sentimental.

Her nature was averse to those mere inclinations of

fondness that find a charm in the senses. With her, love was an ardent affection for an ideal object, an aspiration of the soul, and she was not likely to be influenced deeply by any amorous protestation where respect was destroyed.

The sentiments that inspired her could never be measured by a heartless voluptuary, whose creed was self-indulgence, and whose sole barrier was human respect.

Thus, this momentary weakness was at once replaced by a strong reactionary tide of indignation, at the instant recollection that this submissive devotion and passionate demonstration were due to another, and, before high heaven, not hers to accept.

The superior part of her nature asserted itself, and her reply was measured in words, and cold in manner:—

“You do not in anyway understand me, Neale Volland,” she said, “and perhaps it is just as well that we define our relations to each other with precision now, once for all. We first met some three months ago. I was driving a spirited horse, and you were on horseback. You managed the beautiful animal well, and I admired you and the skill you displayed. By some inexplicable train of ideas, I was silly enough to connect your equestrianism with the far-fetched notion I had conceived of the typical heroes of knight-errantry. Doubtless, I expressed my admiration without meaning it, by my fixed regard, and you, with the ready preception of a man of the world, were aware of it. You sought an early introduction, and almost at once openly

declared yourself a suitor for my hand. I had just left school, did not know the world (oh, how old I have since grown), and had never been formally introduced into society. You knew me to be an orphan girl who had just attained her legal majority, and that my sole protector, my father's faithful friend who had been my guardian, was abroad. You pressed your suit, responded to all my foolish fancies, allowed my imagination to run riot, when I pictured the delights of an idyllic existence which should smoothly run its course at this dear old homestead. At first, you permitted me to think you a bachelor and fancy free, as to all your past. Then, later on, when your valet happened to say something that made me suppose you to be a widower, you assumed a tone of gentle raillery in acknowledging the fact. You said that I had blotted out all the past so completely for you, that you had lived only in the present. This miserable compliment pleased my vanity, and although I would not in the beginning have been satisfied to have shared a life that had in its past memories been given to another, yet such was my infatuation, that I overcame this instinctive sentiment in your favor.

“I am all unskilled in logic, or definitions; I am but a released school-girl without real knowledge of the world, while you are a man conversant with its ways. You know, Neale Volland, that, inferentially, I have been deceived. I arraign you before the tribunal of your own conscience, as one who has treacherously inveigled me into a ceremony of marriage.”

The gay libertine thus abjured was stung to the quick, and a crimson tide of anger flushed his usually pale face, but he felt that success was imperative, that he had gone too far to recede, and like the gambler who stakes his all upon the hazard of a die, he dared not lose his self-control.

But, the mere passional attraction he had once felt for this statuesque woman began to be blended with very opposing feelings, for it is an anomaly often occurring, that merely sensuous love, when repulsed, readily turns to hate. It is a soil prolific of venemous and deadly growth, however hidden by its luxuriant warmth of coloring.

He was maddened to perceive that he was read and critically adjudged by this unfledged girl, and he was in despair to encounter insuperable obstacles when he had supposed success was assured. But whatever the frenzy that convulsed him, he mastered his emotion and assumed his most winning manner.

“Paulina,” he replied, “how can you be so pitiless, so unjust to one who must ever be your humble adorer? I implore you to consider that we are legally man and wife; that in the eye of the law we belong to each other; that the world and society will recognize our union, and that if you persist in indulging in these sentimental vagaries, you will place us both in a very false and embarrassing position. Moreover, my dearest one, it is your duty to set aside any feeling of prejudice you may have, and acknowledge me as your husband.”

“I do acknowledge sir,” she replied, “that at present I am unhappily tied to you by a civil contract which possibly society with its artificial rules may recognize; but I never can.”

“Why should you, my charmer,” he replied, “thus discriminate against the laws of your country?”

“I do not do so,” she responded; “I only propose to avail myself of their laxity, and do as you have done—procure a divorce.”

Neale Volland now grew very pale, but gave no other sign of the interior conflict that raged. But could Paulina have had but a glimpse of the fierceness of his anger, she would have been dismayed.

Again he pleaded, “And why should my lovely Paulina consider divorce as a crime? A witty Frenchman has said, that Adam would doubtless have claimed the privilege had one other woman existed. Does not my darling little moralist know, that it is impossible in this world to realize one’s ideal — that he who possesses her heart would form the sole exception. Mankind in general must live, breathe, and have their being according to prosaic laws and actual needs. We must all bend to circumstances and not make a law for ourselves.

“When the laws endorse any course of action, all needed social requirements are met, nor should we build for ourselves a higher standard than is enforced by the constitution of the land; why, my precious little one,” and his voice fell caressingly as might have done the soft sibilations of the arch-tempter on the ear of Eve,

“the philosophies of the day, hold divorce to be one of the great safeguards through which the integrity of marriage is preserved. It is deemed a preventive measure, to ward off crime. It is against all natural inclinations to hold matrimony as indissoluble. How many noble and useful lives would thus be immolated through cruel repulsion, and do we not in this favored nation, hold liberty as something more than a name? And shall not this most precious boon be permitted for the heart?”

“Certainly my beautiful angel you were created for love. It has been said that woman was not formed by God, but that she came direct from the heart of man, while you, my fair wisdom, make me rather fear that you are Minerva issuing from the brain of Jove.

“What indeed is my fault? Do you reproach me for having loved you madly?”

“And, Paulina, you did vouchsafe me some return of my illimitable love, until this insane idea took possession of you. Rest tranquil and assured my darling, that I am in fact as in name, your best friend, your legal protector.”

Paulina did not attempt to interrupt him and only spoke when he paused.

“Shall I,” she asked, “live with you, solely because I love you? Or shall you live with me solely because you love me? If so, marriage should be indissoluble because love calls for unity, and it is a sentiment that demands an absolute and an individual possession of its object.”

“And marriage, Neale Volland, was established by heaven on this principle, that it should be the union of one with one, and these two making but one, represent unity.

“Now you would have but the union of *one at a time* ; one succeeding the other. This, to my apprehension, is worse than polygamy, for it is a tie liable to constant disruption. When the Lord permitted a plurality of wives to his favored nation, still he forbade divorce. But when the old law ceased to be, and the new law took its place, then marriage was elevated in dignity. It became indissoluble except by death.

“Can any woman ever consider her home secure if motives of self interest, if the passions, if fancy, if frivolous love of change can invade or desecrate its sanctity ?

“No, Neale Volland; a thousand, thousand times *no*. It may be necessary to set aside a civil contract, but there is no higher law to compel my obedience to you.

“There *is* a higher law regulating marriage, and under its law you owe fealty to that first wife, and not to me. May God help and comfort her, if you have left her alone and desolate ! You have doubtless broken her heart, but it shall be no fault of mine that she is widowed.

“But should I listen to the allurements of the passions and take my place as your wife, what surety have I, in turn, of a continuance of happiness ? Am I, too, to have but an ephemeral existence ?

“Suppose that in the course of years I am unfortunate; that I become blind, or deaf, or infirm and unattractive through sickness; that in addition I suffer loss of fortune, and am dependent on you for support, you can at any moment appeal to the terrible law for relief; you can plead some figment out of the many that can be readily proved. What happens next? I am doomed to retire in my turn as did number one, and make way for some successful rival.

“And, Neale Voland, I would deserve such a fate, did I accept your law of divorce, and avail myself of it to the detriment of any living woman. You cannot offer me marriage in the sense of a divinely appointed institution, and therefore you have no equivalent to give me in exchange for the loyalty of my life which would be yours. My heart, my soul craves more than you can satisfy—farewell.”

So saying, with a sudden movement, and a gesture of repulsion, she quickly left the room.

An hour later the accomplished bridegroom and his clever valet departed from Hazlehurst.

CHAPTER V.

SLY AND PRY.

THAT evening Paulina sat very lonely, very much perplexed, and yet very well satisfied with her own course of action.

She tried in vain to solve that constantly recurring problem that will perplex us, of "what next?" when she was startled by a loud cry from Nora, who was in the adjoining room.

Paulina was too young to appreciate how severely the strain of the past few days had told upon her nerves, but her heart had been wrought to such a taut tension, that the least shock upset her.

She burst into tears at hearing the outcry, wringing her hands, and quite sure that some new calamity had suddenly overtaken her.

Then, almost at the same instant she was seized with an hysteria of laughter, at the droll appearance Nora presented as she marched into the room, holding triumphantly over her head a wide-spread new silk umbrella, on the outside of which was a carefully written label—"Returned through the confessional—ask no questions. Incog."

The poor woman was in a frightful state of excite-

ment, her eyes fairly popping out of her head, her face like a flaming peony, and her cotton cap twisted awry by the umbrella points that had caught in its ruffle when hastily opened.

“Faix an’ a maracle it is,” she cried out, “an more by the Latinity on the tail ind on’t; ‘in—cog;’ a nine days’ wonder! Returned widout axing no questions eider; an’ all by its lone self an’ as good as noo, afther a skit of twinty years; an’ ef Margaret Maguire only know’d of it, she that was the mither of the darther that mahried the car-conductor, now a widdy-man, an’ mither an’ darther now both in the clay—thim that’s did it, wid the incog, did the dacent thing, an’ handy too, an’ meself is more happy now nor a millionaire, more by token, the rumbril was sint from the holy place, an’ silk too, ivery shrid on’t.

“Bliss’d be thim, nor is affected wid a conshunse. An’ where, me pet, was I, meself, whin it came back into me possesshun. Was it walkin’ I was? No, indade. Was it stannin’ I was? No, indade. Was it settin’ I was? No, indade. Was I out? Was I in? Was I lookin’ around afther it? It’s skeersome as how it happint. I was takin’ wan iyster wid wan cup of tay, wid the sthroke of wan limmin in ’t, whin I was thinkin’ that, afther all, me pet, it was gude riddance of bad rubbish that Walley that skitted, an’ all on a suddint, me eye lifted an’ the idintikil rumbril all convanient, plase ye, was a stannin’ agin the chimbley, wid this tag on’t.”

An umbrella had, indeed, been returned, purporting

to be the very one lost or stolen a score of years ago, all unused, but no one could solve the mystery.

“It is strange, Nora,” said Paulina, wiping her eyes, for she had laughed tears into them, “that any umbrella is ever returned, and this is truly most remarkable.”

“It’s the turn of the day, me pet, that means good luck,” said she.

“Well, I hope so,” answered Paulina, sighing. “Come now, Nora, shut up the umbrella, it will keep for a rainy day, and tell me if you know of any good lawyer in town, for I have never noticed who they are.”

Thereupon Nora closed the precious umbrella very carefully, fastened the clasp around it, smoothed out the wrinkles and remarked:

“I, meself will dhrown first, fut-sore, too, nor this rumbril shall iver be used. As to thim ly’ers, I know’d of a furrum forninst the court-house an’ anninst the Gran’ Hotel. I know’d Jerry Fagan, he that kipt a dairy, an’ he had a twinty-dollar kuh stole, an’ he wint to thim ly’ers for saddisfacshun.

“‘Can ye give me compensashun fur me twinty-dollar kuh, she that is stole,’ sed Jerry.

“‘We kin,’ ses they. ‘Kum agin’ this day sennit.’

“When Jerry wint agin’, he ask’t thim :—

“‘Have ye me kuh?’

“‘The rogue’s in jug, fast enough,’ ses they, ‘that stole ye kuh. The kuh’s in poun fur ye—we clapp’t thim both in.’

“ ‘The divil ye did,’ ses Jerry. ‘How much ter git her out?’

“ ‘Twenty-five dollars ter pay,’ ses they, ‘for fee an’ poun.’

“ ‘Take five dollars, thin,’ ses Jerry, ‘an’ kape yer kuh.’

“An’ he wint away sore at heart, but thim ly’ers got the rogue, the kuh, an’ five siller dollers to boot.”

“That is a queer recommendation, Nora,” said Paulina, smiling, “but to-morrow morning we will drive to town, and you may take me to their office. They seem to be shrewd men at a bargain, perhaps they can help me.”

The next day Paulina and Nora set out in search of this firm of clever lawyers, and their place of business was readily found. It was in quite a large, three-story brick building, entirely devoted to lawyers’ offices, and rooms of real estate agents. Just within the door were various little sign-boards, pointing with an index finger upwards, and directing those who came on business where to go.

On the second floor were three rooms, each opening into the main corridor, and over each was printed, in large letters, “C. Sly & O. Pry, Attorneys at Law.”

Evidently, these gentlemen had a flourishing practice, for when Nora tapped at the first door at the head of the stairs, no one seemingly paid any attention, and when, after a repetition of the summons, she opened the door and looked in, she found herself equally un-

heeded. This ante-room contained a number of persons who appeared to be waiting their turn, and as Nora beckoned to Paulina to come in, and she entered the room, she would have drawn back and retired, had not a gentleman who seemed to be in authority there, partly opened a side door, and catching a glimpse of her elegant figure, hastened by a dexterous flank movement to arrest her steps. He shot out of the side door, through an obscure passage into the main hall, and from thence made signs to Paulina, who still stood at the door of the ante-room, to follow him.

It was none other than Mr. Sly himself, the senior partner of the firm, who had noticed a handsome carriage drive up to the building a few minutes before, and who now conjectured that this beautiful young lady had, doubtless, business of unusual importance to transact. He at once decided that such a visitor required his own immediate and particular attention, and opening the second door that led into the main hall, ushered them into a large and luxuriously-appointed room, which he remarked was his "den."

He was scarcely, however, disposed to admit Nora, for looking at her doubtingly, as she closely followed her mistress, he inquired with a polite bow—

"And this person also?"

"Yes," said Paulina, "she is my faithful maid. I have no secrets from her."

"But," expostulated he, making a gentle movement as if about to close the door, "a third party breaks in

upon the confidence due to a legal adviser. Shall not your attendant wait in the ante-room."

"No, misther," answered Nora, with decision, at the same time pushing herself through the partly closed door, without any ceremony. "Me an' she, can niver be taken apart."

And if it is not indiscreet, may I inquire who it is that does me the honor?" asked Mr. Sly, in an apologetic tone.

Now this was the first occasion in which Paulina had found it necessary to use a cognomen, since her marriage two days ago, and she could not avoid blushing with embarrassment. She experienced an aversion to giving the name of Voland, which she was so anxious to be relieved of, and yet she could scarcely introduce herself by her maiden name of Peyton.

Mr. Sly, with the quick perception of his profession, at once deprecated having asked the question.

"Pardon me," he said; "these little sentiments of delicacy are much to be respected. Pray be seated, Miss — or perhaps I should say madam."

Hereupon Nora came to Paulina's relief, and interloqued :

"She's nayther the wan nor the ither. She's bether nor both. She's siparated."

"Madam," immediately responded Mr. Sly, "a word to the wise is sufficient. I perceive that you seek redress for some marital infelicity. You have, I trust I may say, found exactly the right person to whom to come

for relief, as our firm may be deemed, peculiarly, divorce lawyers. Our business has always been prosperous, and steadily increasing, but within the past year it is assuming such magnitude, that we are no longer able to give our attention to all the cases presented. We have now on hand the longest list of divorce libels we have ever been called upon to present. We find it imperative under such constantly increasing pressure, to discriminate more carefully than we have hitherto done, and only give our time to parties whose high social standing enables them to meet the requisite charges as well as our fees, which, of course, are considerable. But we shall be pleased, madam, to consider your case as one of especial interest, to which I, myself, the senior partner, shall give my most earnest attention."

Having delivered himself of this quasi oration, he threw himself in an easy attitude in his revolving office chair, stroked together the few straggling hairs of a sandy colored moustache he was cultivating, and turned a little to one side with owl-like gravity, as if prepared to hear, and give ponderous advice.

At this moment a youngish man of smart appearance, bright, snappish eyes, black, closely trimmed heavy beard and hair, and altogether a priggish, lively, dapper man, entered the room.

"My junior partner, Mr. Pry, madam," explained the senior, for it could scarcely be deemed an introduction.

But the junior also appeared somewhat disposed to

interest himself in their fair client, and was about to take a seat, when his senior said with considerable asperity of manner :

“It is not requisite to remain, Mr. Pry. You will be sent for in case your services are needed.”

Whereupon Mr. Pry jumped up in a jerky way as if he might have sat down upon pins inadvertently, made a spasmodic like bow, and quickly disappeared.

“And now, my dear madam,” resumed the imperturbable Mr. Sly, assuming a provokingly confidential air, “will you be pleased to make known to me the circumstances that cause one so fair and youthful to become an applicant for a divorce, for such, I doubt not, is your mission here.”

“My situation,” said Paulina, with much emotion, which she could not repress at the thought of the desolation that had brought her even into business relations with such a disagreeable man, “is a very extraordinary one, and will, I fear, tax your legal acumen to the utmost.”

“Do not fear as to the result, when we assume your case, madam,” interrupted Mr. Sly. “We have never yet failed in procuring divorces when applied for by parties of wealth and high position. Make yourself then, quite easy on that score.

“In the first place, there exists no general law regulating marriage throughout the United States, and the statutes and decisions as to what constitutes a valid contract even, are so varied in the different states as to give

the greatest latitude of construction. These inharmoonious definitions makè, I may say, this country a paradise for clever divorce lawyers, and then we are often assisted by the extraordinarily stupid renderings of judgment that one may bring about ;” and he gleefully rubbed his hands as if he figuratively gathered in the full harvest that a nation’s criminal carelessness in this field has left for busy gleaners.

Paulina was inexpressibly shocked, as she thus painfully gathered in the world’s wisdom, and she was disgusted with men who derived satisfaction and profit out of the discord of families. Theirs was but a system of chicanery, and here she found herself like a silly moth, with wings singed and fluttering in a flame, that was ever fanned by such efforts.

Yet she knew that she could not extricate herself, and so like some distracted insect, she must continue to hover helplessly within the dangerous circle.

Mr. Sly construed her silence as approval, and desiring to make the best possible impression on so lovely a lady, he continued :

“I beg you, my dear madam, to yield me your unreserved confidence, and inform me fully of the nature of your difficulties. You can form but a slight idea of the facility that exists, for dissolving any contract of marriage whatever. Once establish that marriage is nothing more than a civil contract regulated by law, and you must at once perceive that this relation, arising out of such agreement, being provided for by law, can

also be abrogated by law. A stream cannot rise to a higher level than its fountain head, and we made an immense stride towards dissolving the stability of the nuptial tie, when we swept away the musty restraints of the ecclesiastical law, with their senseless appeal to what they are pleased to designate as higher law. So many meanings are involved, when one has only to deal with forms of civil law. Obligations change with change of residence. Each State has its own marriage law, and it is quite practicable to move from one State to another, with the view of affecting the validity of a contract which has different interpretations. There are, to be sure, laws, presumably regulating the law of the domicile, but these rules are subject to so many exceptions, as to be readily set aside. In fact, dear madam, were I not restrained by professional honor, I could mention to you various instances where people of fashion have so profited, and no loss of social prestige has ensued.

“But I cannot indicate, as to what application of law can be made in your case, until you will graciously make me conversant with all the facts involved.”

He then paused, cast upon Paulina a subdued and winning glance to invite her confession, and awaited her statement.

“My story, sir,” said she, “may be told in a few words. I have been so silly as to allow myself to be wooed and wedded during the past three months by a gentleman who pressed his suit with ardor, and who

pleased my fancy, because I attributed to him qualities which he has not. Two days ago we were privately wedded. I was at the time under the impression that he was a widower, but almost immediately after the ceremony, he informed me that he was a divorced man. He allowed me to marry him, when he must have supposed me to be in ignorance of this fact, and I am too indignant at the tacit deception he has practiced, to be willing to live with him as his wife. He has been divorced, I know not for what cause, and I seek the same remedy. When he made known to me that she who was his wife was living, I instantly left him, nor have we met but once since then, when my faithful maid was present, who is now here with me. I can never consent to become his wife, and I have so told him, bidding him farewell, and declaring my intention to seek a divorce."

As the recollection of this fatal union against which her soul revolted impressed her, she burst into tears.

Mr. Sly seemed deeply affected, and took out of his pocket a perfumed handkerchief, with which he duly wiped his sympathetic, moist eyes.

"And the name of this base creature, who has thus dared to inveigle into the matrimonial tie so much youthful innocence and beauty?" inquired he in almost a whisper.

Paulina, was too much absorbed with her own distressing thoughts to pay much attention to the manner of this man, although she was quite conscious of an

instinctive dislike of his fawning sentimentality. This sentiment of repulsion, caused her instantly to repress the unbidden tears, and she coldly replied:

“The gentleman, whom I was so unfortunate as to marry, is Mr. Neale Volland.”

An involuntary exclamation of surprise escaped Mr. Sly, which Paulina observed.

“You are then acquainted with Mr. Neale Volland?” she inquired.

But Mr. Sly had quickly recovered himself, and merely answered, “Slightly, madam.”

“Can you aid me?” she asked.

“Without a doubt,” he responded.

May I ask,” said Paulina with a choking sensation, that made it difficult for her to speak, “if my plain statement will suffice; if my release from this abhorred bond will involve no prevarication, no quibbling of any kind?”

Mr. Sly regarded her for a moment with an air of cold displeasure, but the charm of her beauty, conquered the angry impulse.

“You have only, madam,” said he, in a rigid way, to make oath that you were forced into this marriage, to prove that your consent, which is of the very essence of the contract, was not given freely, and the contract is void. Surely you can assert that much.”

“I cannot make such an oath,” said Paulina firmly,

“Then, there was at least error and fraud?” suggested he very blandly.

“ Only that error, sir, that arises from misconstruction, and that fraud which must be deemed tacit, and not direct,” she courageously replied.

“ What have we to do with ethical subtleties, or school-girl logical definitions,” he impatiently responded. “ You were either deceived, or you were not deceived.”

“ Inferentially I was deceived,” she said.

“ It is not enough,” said he contemptuously; “ inferentially is a long word and a useless one in law. No mistake you may have made affecting character, or any fanciful attributed traits, involving disappointment, can effect the validity of your marriage. Do not, my dear lady, deceive yourself in this matter. You may withhold your respect or affection, but that is a mere matter of sentiment. The law cannot take cognizance of your action unless your husband seeks redress in consequence, and demands a divorce. This I fancy he will not be very likely to do. But we can look elsewhere in the various ramifications of our flexible divorce laws, for relief. We can construe deceit in order to induce consent, we can plead your youth and utter inexperience effectually, and we can prove your instant repudiation of the union in order to establish a nullity.”

But Paulina did not look satisfied, which her legal adviser observing, remarked with a well simulated air of commiseration :

“ Your absolute ignorance of the world, dear madam, has permitted you to make this serious mistake, and I

trust that you will therefore be guided in your attempts to extricate yourself from these grave embarrassments by those who best know how to aid you. And rest assured that your interests in this delicate matter will be as faithfully guarded as if they were my own."

These words spoken with an air of perfect candor, seemed so very reasonable, that they made an impression on Paulina, who said:

"I am, indeed sir, quite unequal to meet the complications that have arisen out of my own unwise conduct, and I must needs rely on your knowledge and judgment."

The learned counsel looked gratified and said in a very encouraging way:

"Do not, I beg you, distress yourself. Leave the conduct of this case to me. I have brought to a successful issue many cases involving greater perplexities, altho' never one, fair lady, where so much delicacy and refinement of sentiment made a client so very interesting. It will not, I am sure, be difficult to prove absolute incompatibility."

Paulina looked surprised. It had never, even remotely, occurred to her, that anything constructively so indirect as an incompatibility, could be tortured into a sufficient legal cause for divorce. She began to realize, more and more, that any union formed under conditions so liable to be disturbed or swept away was but a rope of sand, ever shifting with the ceaseless ebb and flow of the tide of human passions. Something like a prayer

ascended from her heart, not yet hardened by the selfish sophistries of the day, that this most sacred of all human ties should be better guarded.

All this while Nora had remained in a corner of the room, listening with breathless attention, observing everything, and if not fairly understanding the voluble flow of words, comprehending very well that the upshot of it all was how to free her mistress.

She suddenly recalled a remark, incidentally made by Hermann, the valet, that it was disagreeable to sleep near his master, after he had indulged in one of his famous terrapin suppers, because he snored so — and she felt sure that this smart lawyer could twist something out of so disagreeable a habit that would help their cause — so she burst forth into one of her peculiar tirades: “Plaze ye, misther, an’ I mane no disre-speck, nayther ter ye, nor leastwise ter ye Honorable Court, ef the cap fits, but, wull it not stan’ afore the law, in a case of ceevil contrack, an’ no dacent mah-riage in howly church ter obligate, ef a mon onceevilly snores? His walley, wot knows his ways, can prove it agin’ him.”

“Capital!” said Mr. Sly, laughing. “He snores, the wretch, does he? I was once able to procure a divorce, on account of this very intolerable grievance. No more serious incompatibility can possibly exist. Thanks, my good woman, for this valuable suggestion.”

“I am, sir,” said Paulina, blushing, and at the same time rising to leave, “anxious to change my residence,

and go away from Hazlehurst during the progress of the divorce suit, which you are about to institute for me. I would find it painful, at such a time, to receive visits from my friends. My late guardian, Mr. Noble, is abroad, and I have no one to advise me in his absence. I desire to find a very retired place, where I can go with my maid and remain quite isolated until this disagreeable matter is brought to a close."

A curious gleam shot into the half averted eyes of Mr. Sly; there was a slight elevation of the shaggy, sandy eyebrows, as she spoke, and he quickly answered:

"Most discreet and fair of women, I can recommend you to just such a retreat. It is a lonely and an inaccessible spot in the Green Mountains, known as Timber Ridge. It will give me pleasure to write a note to the good woman who has charge of the old place, and I will send you minute written directions, to enable you to find the exact locality."

"Oh thanks," said Paulina, and with a grateful impulse she actually gave him her hand, as she bade him good-bye.

As the door closed, and he sank back into the depths of his luxurious easy-chair in an ecstasy of self-gratulation, he muttered to himself —

"Mephistopheles in fact, out-done. Well, I am not a divorced man, thank heaven, *not yet*. I am only a bachelor. I am rich, blessed be the follies of society, nor am I exactly ill-looking; well, let *that* pass, for I am better yet, clever as the devil, and who cares for more

than that in a man. Above all, I am in love with her. Ye gods! but she is irresistible, with that proud, cold, distant air.

“And you thought she was yours, Neale Volland! You sly, old dog, more wicked than witty! Out-witted! Ha, ha! I have your cool five thousand, the price of breaking poor Miriam’s heart, who really loves you. She is a fine woman too. But I don’t blame you, with such a tempting prize in view. Married, but not mated, and now you are fated, for I have sent your bride where she will find your Miriam. Hidden away so safely out of sight, eh? Won’t this queenly beauty hate you, when she knows all, yes *all*. How I would fairly gloat on the sight of their meeting. But it’s glory enough, to have brought them together. Satan was but a dullard in the garden of Eden. He never finished his perfect work, until he invented——Divorce.”

CHAPTER VI.

MIRIAM.

PAULINA had received such accurate written directions from her able counsel, Mr. Sly, as to enable herself and Nora to make the journey with ease as far as Sleepy Valley, which was ten miles distant from Timber Ridge. On reaching this place, however, no other conveyance than an open country wagon could be secured at any price, to take the remainder of this rough mountain drive, for after leaving Sleepy Valley below, the ascent of the mountain became very precipitous. The steep road, rudely cut out of the hillside, was barely wide enough to allow the passage of one vehicle at a time, yet it was so seldom traveled over, that there was but slight danger of any rencounter. But once having gained the top of this saddle of the mountain, there was ample compensation for this discomfort, in the unimpeded view afforded; and Paulina, who loved nature, and reveled in its luxuriance when at her own superb country seat, was much impressed with the appearance it presented in this desolate solitude.

The gorge had shut them in so closely during the ascent, that she was quite unprepared for the splendid panoramic view that burst upon them from the moment they gained the summit.

By her repeated expressions of admiration, she all unwittingly got the good-will of the honest farmer, who had reluctantly consented, although amply paid for his trouble, to turn out of his way to take her to the old manse on the top of Timber Ridge—for half a century ago the place had been one of some pretensions, and was inhabited, so the story goes, by an old miser who would have no one near him.

“I do admire, Miss,” said the driver, giving his horses an extra cut, “to see your spunk; but why on airth do you ambition to spend a winter at Timber Ridge? I calculate, you’ll find it too bitter cold to stay. Folks do say that ever since old Skinflint lived there, counting over his gold, that on stormy nights his chink rattles underground, and can be hur’n. He was a queer customer, and some say he left no kin-folks. The old woman who stays there now come to the place unbeknownst to everybody. Soon after she lit down there, the sick lady and her boy came. The old woman’s a curious fish, they do say, and I guess you’ll not find things in apple-pie order. Be you any kin to the sick lady?”

“I did not know there was such a person there,” answered Paulina.

“Now, deu tell!” said he, with unfeigned astonishment.

“Why, I allotted you be cousins. We be e’ena’most there, and I’m glad of it, although I’m proud to know you, Miss.”

After a few minutes' drive, during which Paulina was lost in admiration at the outspreading landscape, for they had now gained the very top of the ridge, the man exclaimed :

“ Well, here we be ! Bein' there's no dogs to skeer you, you can just lite here at the gate, for I still have to go pretty considerable ways to get to hum before dark.”

So saying, he lifted their trunks inside the gate, helped them to descend, and made off. So unceremonious was his departure that Paulina stood for a moment, bewildered to find herself thus suddenly at her journey's end. But she was speedily aroused by Nora's plaintive remark, “ Alanna, me pet, it's a dead house, an' not the sign of a live craythur hereabout.”

It was an old house, a very old house, with a projecting upper story and a clumsy outside stone chimney placed against the gable end that fronted the road. The moss-covered shingle roof was pierced with one large dormer window, much resembling a sentry box keeping watch over the place, and the grass-grown unused country road they had just traveled, wound its sinuous course a hundred yards distant. The rough wall made of stones loosely piled on each other, had fallen in places nearly to the ground, and a crazy looking gate hung open, swinging on partly broken hinges. Not far from the house was an open well, walled with an insecure rim which threatened to cave in, and out of whose clear depths rose a high swing-beam, holding its

empty bucket aloft, like some gallows' rogue dangling in mid-air.

The entire gable end, chimney and all, was covered with a huge wisteria vine, which in summer must have embowered it with a sheen of empurpled glory, but now, stripped of every leaf, its rich clusters of dreamy flowers faded away like the brief splendor of a glowing sunset, it clung dismantled with its twisted stem round and round the chimney top, seizing every inequality of surface presented for support, even as man does in the desolate winter of life, when one can no longer stand alone.

A fine Norway spruce, which must at one time have been planted for ornament, stood near the door, a graceful sentinel to a spot of most forbidding aspect, and its beauty was enhanced by the feathery snow flakes that rested on its coniferous surface, delicately vesting with contrasting whiteness the curving lines of its sombre hued branches. Winter sets in apace in this latitude, where the mountain altitude alone anticipates its coming. But the crisp and clear air is bracing to the nerves and, if one responds with healthful effort, most invigorating.

The quaint character of the spot, with its wide and splendid outlook, blended with Paulina's dreamy mood, and did not oppress, but rather strengthened her. As she still gazed upon the beautiful scenery, she heard the fresh voice of a child within the vestibule, evidently calling back to some one within the house, "Mamma, dear mamma, I do believe *he* has come."

Almost at the instant, a beautiful boy of seven or eight years of age, with soft blue eyes and streaming flaxen ringlets, bounded down the rickety steps, and stood at her side.

But what a dazed look of childish sorrow; what an appealing glance met hers!

Paulina at once understood that some one had been desired, and that one long looked for had not come.

“I am sorry, my pretty dear,” she gently said, “that I am not the expected friend.”

“Oh, I am so sorry,” he replied, with the frank innocence of childhood. “I was sure it was my papa.”

His eyes were full of tears, but children never cease to hope, and as he quickly brushed away the fast falling drops, he said in a brave way, “mamma must not see me cry. It would make her sick. You know she has no one to take care of her but me, until papa comes back; and he stays oh, *so long!* *I don't care,*” he added, tossing back his curls with a proud look—“*He's nothing to me, but only my mamma—if he just would make her stop crying, I could take care of myself, for am I not a little man? But come in and see my beautiful mamma, and if you can tell her all about my papa, who has never come back, she will be glad to see you, and so shall I.*”

So saying he took Paulina's hand and led her into the house.

What was it in a certain air and manner of this charming child that startled Paulina and reminded her

so painfully of some familiar presence? Whatever it was she felt the chord of memory deeply stirred, but could not trace the indefinable connection.

There was a long, low, dimly-lighted hall, with a blackened oaken ceiling, with heavy transverse beams that frowned down upon all intruders. A stairway of ample width had a carved balustrade, evincing some good taste when the house had been built a hundred years ago.

Into this hall there opened a large room, whose deep English fireplace, set far back in the wall, afforded space for a stiff, high-backed wooden settle on either side, and gave to what was otherwise a plain room, an air of quaint picturesqueness.

At the very door, Paulina paused to let the child precede her and make her presence known; but at the moment he entered he screamed, "I have killed her!" and throwing himself on the floor at his mother's feet, sobbed as if his heart would break.

Hearing this distressed cry, both Paulina and Nora hurriedly went in, and found the poor lady extended on a low couch — she had fainted.

Nora ran to the well for water, and Paulina had fortunately some restoratives at hand, in her traveling satchel.

She stooped for an instant to kiss the dear child, and whisper in his ear:

"Be a good little man. If you cry so, it will make mamma worse. She will be better in a few minutes."

The lesson of self-restraint was familiar to this child. He had almost from infancy learned to overcome himself for her dear sake. He had always seen her unhappy, and to relieve her had been his ardent wish day by day, month by month, and reaching up through the short space of his life, until it grew into a sense of responsibility, such as seldom oppresses childhood. A concern for the welfare of those entrusted to our care forms, perhaps, the heaviest burden imposed, as we toil onwards in the pilgrimage of life; but it is one of the usual privileges of infancy and early youth to have no anxiety for others, but to be oneself the tender object of solicitude.

Unfortunate, indeed, is the child upon whom falls this blight.

Adverse circumstances had thrown this baby life into shadow, and it was only the sudden shock that had so overcome a strength of purpose far beyond the child's years. For when he saw his mother unconscious, the horrible thought seized him that his hasty speech about his father's coming had killed her; and he fell upon his face as if to shut out the awful sight forever. But at these cheering words of Paulina he became quiet, and raising his head slightly, ventured to take a little peep through his open fingers to watch his darling.

The efforts of Paulina and Nora soon revived the poor lady, who, heaving a deep sigh, faintly whispered, her eyes still closed; "Neale, my precious child."

Low and tremulous as was the voice, the quick ear

of the loving boy caught the summons, and he instantly sprang to his feet, threw his arms around her neck, and covered her pale face with tender kisses.

“Mamma, sweet mamma,” pleaded he, “live for me, I love you so.”

As Miriam, for she it was, revived sufficiently to breathe forth, with blanched lips, the name of “Neale,” Paulina was bending over her, gently chafing the blue-veined temples with cologne.

The resemblance of the child to some indefinable link of the past was at once made clear.

The revelation, to her acute perceptions, was as entire as if the whole story had been told her, with the utmost minuteness with which words could elaborate it.

But no power of words could ever describe the flood of emotion that overwhelmed her as witness to so sad a scene.

Her vivid imagination divined the lingering suffering, the crushed hopes of unrequited love, of disappointed expectations.

Yet, she could not divine, for she could not sound, the depths of a villainy that had brought it all to pass.

And yet, that which she now saw was but one of the many, the oft-repeated acts, in the sickening drama of divorce.

One of the phases that has been enacted and re-enacted, under our very eyes, forming the floating current gossip of all society, from the lowest ranks to the

highest social circles, without the fact being duly weighed, that treachery in the marriage tie, means wasted life, heart-break, a victim immolated, a family uprooted — a cyclone that has so fully done its hellish work as to utterly sweep away the sacred family altar, and destroy, root and branch, the fairest tree of Paradise.

Alas, for the tender branches, the buds of promise that are thus consumed and blighted.

As Paulina looked upon the emaciated figure, the pallid face, the sunken eyes, the hectic glow, sure harbingers of a swift-coming doom, she realized that this life had been literally consumed in the fierceness of a struggle beyond the strength of this woman to bear; and she indignantly contrasted the buoyant, self-satisfied air, the handsome figure, fine complexion and debonair manner of her oppressor. For the one, her soul was filled with pity, from the other, she turned away with intense loathing. So torn was her heart by this rude conflict of feeling, so dazed was she by this inexpressible sorrow brought with such force before her, that she, too, grew faint, as she almost unconsciously bent over the drooping sufferer. Objects indistinctly swam before her gaze; she seemed to have assumed suddenly some impossible shape, to be receding from this dismal scene, her body felt light and as if she walked the clouds, and the low, sad tones of the mother, mingled with the sweet pleadings of the child, reached her as if she were a looker-on from some height in another world.

Great God! thought she; am I too a victim to be offered up on this insatiate funereal pyre, where hecatombs of wives are needed to mark the progress of one man's perfidy covered over by law?

At this moment she was gently but firmly grasped by Nora, who led her to one of the wooden settles within the fireplace, and bathing her temples, gave her of the limpid well-water to drink.

"Me pet," she whispered in awed tones, "be brave; shure an' yer trial's sore—it's *she*; it is, poor thing."

And Paulina and Nora sat there unnoticed, for now the child was all taken up with the joy of the return of his mother's flitting life; and she, with half closed eyes, was too feeble to be conscious of other presence than his.

"Neale, my darling," she faintly said, "he will never come back, and only the grave can tell us why."

"Mamma," said the child, kissing her fondly, "if I dared leave you, I would go away and find my papa and make him come to you."

"No, no, baby," she answered with a slight tremor, "never leave me, precious one; it will soon be over for me; but oh, what is to become of you?"

"Mamma, mamma," sobbed the child, and they wept together. The very air of the long, low room was oppressed with this monotone of woe.

The first shock of this painful discovery over, Paulina was once more herself. She rose, and quickly approaching them, addressed the child with winning grace and tenderness.

“Neale, you have forgotten your promise, dear, to introduce me to your lovely mamma.”

Miriam was so weak she dreaded everything, and this gentle presence made her shudder, she knew not why. Perchance the inner shrine of her spiritual perceptions took the alarm.

Be that as it may, Miriam trembled, yet she only beheld the sympathizing face of a beautiful young girl seeking her confidence.

The child arose, and with much infantile grace, took Paulina's hand, saying——

“Mamma, our dear, new friend.”

Miriam looked inquiringly.

Paulina said: “Dear madam, my sorrows have led me here. I am unhappily mated, and I have been directed here by my lawyer, to be at rest from persecution during the progress of a suit instituted for my divorce.”

Miriam's brilliant eyes had at first indicated distrust, but at this simple recital they softened. She extended her wasted hand.

As Paulina reverently bent over that transparent, shapely little hand, she observed upon a taper finger the mockery of a wedding ring, which had ceased to be a sacred emblem of plighted faith. With fervent kisses, she bedewed it with expiatory tears.

Then, taking from her own finger that circlet the betrayer had placed upon it with false vows, she put it in Miriam's shadowy hand, saying:

“I pray you take it as a pledge between us ; it is yours, not mine.”

Miriam’s large, piercing eyes gazed wonderingly into hers. The dark lines rested under them, as if laid there by an invisible Presence.

But Paulina did not shrink. She was sustained by a proud consciousness of innocence. She knew that she had done no wilful wrong to this bruised heart, that made this eloquent although mute appeal to her. Indeed, she felt a yearning desire to soothe the wound she was powerless to heal. The intuitions of pure-hearted women are aspirations heavenward, and Miriam’s crushed heart responded to Paulina’s gentle advances. She held the ring against the light in her thin hand, looked at it for a moment curiously, and then said :

“This is a wedding ring, *how* can it belong to me? *Why* give it me? She spoke slowly and painfully, with her failing breath. Then looking upon the one she wore, she sobbed, “This ring hangs loosely on my shrunken finger, but it must descend with me into the tomb — it is — my wedding ring.”

“Both are yours,” answered Paulina, with soft insistence, and again she kissed that dainty little hand. “Let it be,” added she “a token.”

“Of what?” asked Miriam.

“Good faith,” answered Paulina.

“But,” said Miriam, “it was vowed to you, and you break faith to part with it, even to a woman. I cannot take it.”

“Not so,” said Paulina, “he who gave it me, desecrated it in the giving, with false vows.”

“How so?” again asked Miriam, now so deeply interested, that with one of those oft recurring changes peculiar to her protean disease, she regained, as it were, a momentary strength, and raised herself upon her couch.

Paulina calmly seated herself on a foot-stool near her, and answered, “Dear lady, it was thus: I was but a vain, foolish, school-girl, and my head turned with silly, romantic notions. Accidentally, I met a handsome man of middle age, of fine presence, and most fluent in the use of honied phrases. Three months after we met we were married. Our mutual vows were scarcely plighted, when he made me the terrible avowal that he was not a widower, as I had supposed him to be, but a divorced man, and she who had been his loving wife still living.”

“The base wretch,” exclaimed Miriam with flashing eyes, and the bright spot on her sunken cheek glowed a deeper crimson.

“So I thought,” said Paulina, with a strangely exultant tone, “for in that very hour I left him, and now am here awaiting a divorce.”

“And that other one?” asked Miriam, the unearthly glow of those eyes blending with the dark shadows beneath them, and all consuming themselves within the vivid burning incarnadine of her cheek.

“That other one,” said Paulina, “was by this false man basely deceived.”

“In what way?” asked Miriam, her voice sinking into a weird whisper, and the golden ring of Paulina slipped from out her relaxed hand.

“In every way,” replied Paulina. “But first let us destroy this bauble, which is neither fit for you, nor for me to wear;” and stooping, she picked it up, walked across the room to the fire that smoldered on the open hearth, and with the stately air of a priestess performing some mystic rite, she threw it into the mass of burning coals, where, bending over it with extended hands, she adjured it, saying: “Fire consume thee, flame purify thee! Let no mortal henceforth wear thee, for thou bringest a curse!”

When Paulina returned to her side, Miriam nodded approvingly, as she extended her hand to Paulina. “It is well done,” said she.

The child, who had been a breathless but unnoticed looker-on, now sat down at the foot of the couch, with his azure eyes wonderingly wide open. “Go on with the story now,” said he. Both glanced at him. The mother chided reprovingly — “Neale!”

“The dear boy is right,” said Paulina. “The story is nothing much to tell. It is the old, old tale of woman’s trusting faith and man’s perfidy. The wife was hidden away in a desolate place; it might be such a one as this. She was betrayed by her unfaithful spouse, who turned from her, only to deceive another.

“But, dearest lady, confidence demands a return. And you — have you naught to tell?”

“What is my sad story?” gasped Miriam. “It is told in still fewer words than yours. A doting wife, a handsome husband — very gay, very charming.” Here she paused, as if to rest, and sighed — “oh, so handsome! But I, his wife, lost my health and strength in giving birth to this precious child. For two years I remained confined to my room. I bade him go on without me all the same — how could society spare him? It was lonesome and bitter enough for me to have the world absorb him. But what were my needs, compared to the exigencies of his life! I could not be so selfish.”

Here she sank back quite exhausted, and closed her weary eyes, as if she sought to dream away her little span of life, revelling in that early happiness.

Paulina, taking her listless hand, bedewed it with her tears.

Finally the child spoke. “And then, mamma?” She roused herself. “True, Neale,” she said, “you have been told the rest. Five years ago your father said to me: ‘The doctor insists, Miriam, that you must, if you would live — live for me, he said — go to the country for change of air. There is that old manse that you inherited from your grand-uncle, the miser. The air there is pure and bracing.’”

“‘And you, Neale,’ I asked — ‘am I to go alone to that dreary spot?’”

“‘Oh no,’ said he cheerily, ‘the child will accompany you, and a faithful housekeeper will provide for your wants.’”

“‘And when shall I see you, my husband?’

“‘After a time,’ he said. ‘The doctor will place you there.’ I went—I waited—I am still waiting—I shall ever wait—I feel it; for he comes not.” As she sank back on her pillows with a piteous moan, once again as if in recurring waves of sound, the tremulous air of that long, low room was swayed with the accents of woe. Miriam’s sobs were now broken by the terrible racking cough, and the dear child cried as children do, whose hearts are breaking but not broken.

Paulina and Nora wept with them.

But Miriam, gaining courage, continued. “Can you think of five years here? Just here! Always extended on this couch. Dreary days, restless, sleepless nights, cold in the fearful winters, comfortless—oh, so lonely.”

“Not lonely, mamma,” whispered Neale, “you have me;” and his flaxen ringlets floated like an aureole of light around her pale face as he stooped to kiss her.

“My heart treasure,” she said fondly, kissing him, “you have indeed been all the world for me.” But the worst of the worst,” she resumed, with fainting voice, “has been hope deferred. It is said by those who believe in a purgatory, that the damned endure nothing fiercer than this sickening suspense. Can you measure it?” she said, gazing at Paulina with a hunted look. “Five years, ever watching, ever waiting. My soul has consumed my body during all these wearisome years. When I awake in the morning, I ask myself, will he come to-day? When night falls, will it be to-morrow?”

“If the wind moans, I listen — if a leaf but falls, I start — if the clouds flit by, I feel his shadow stealing in — if the sunshine gladdens, he seems to enter blithely, as of old, on the dancing sunbeams. But no, no, no! he will never, never, never come!” she fairly shrieked, as with a sudden, wild, frenzied movement, she tore away the fillet that bound the masses of once raven hair, now blanched with grief. They fell like a shadowy sheen around her attenuated form, that even now seemed to be melting away beyond the dim boundary line.

“Mamma, sweetness,” asked the child, “why not ask this dear lady if she knows him. She comes from that world, you know?”

At this suggestion, a renewed strength again possessed her, and seizing Paulina’s arm, with eager looks, she exclaimed.

“Have you ever met my husband, Neale Voland? Had you ever seen him, you would remember him, as one in ten thousand, thousand.” “Say, can you bring me news of him? Oh! say yes.”

As Paulina felt the inexpressible yearning of her look, her voice, her gesture, she knew that no torture could ever equal this cruel suspense which must be ended, and she solemnly answered.

“I know him well.”

The child clasped his mother as if to support her, as she fell back as one swooning. Paulina paused, but Miriam feebly motioned her to go on, saying, “Why does he stay away?”

“Do not wish him to come back,” said Paulina. “He is utterly unworthy of such love as yours.”

At this, Miriam, with a flash of renewed force, raised herself and in a severe tone said, “Woman — beware — I am his wife.”

“You are so,” said Paulina, “in the sight of God and His holy angels, but no longer so in the false ideas of men. He has basely betrayed your faithful heart, dearest lady, and — ”

“In the name of the living God I adjure you,” interrupted Miriam fiercely, “tell the whole truth.”

“So help me God” asseverated Paulina, now deadly pale, “he has divorced you.”

When one lingers on the indefinable line of another state of being, the insight is keen. Miriam divined the rest like a flash.

“And you,” she wildly shrieked. “You are — what?”

“I am,” said Paulina solemnly, “that other wronged one.”

A calmness as of despair succeeded the feverish fury of suspense. There was not a sound, until the child, placing himself between them, as might have been in the judgment of Solomon, when the cry arose, “whose is the child?” with inquiring awe depicted on his innocent face, with clear, childish voice, rang out the question:

“Mamma, mamma, tell me, what is she to me? Is she one of my first parents?”

“She,” said Miriam with a stone-like rigidity, “she

will be your mother when I am no more. Take her as one worthy, sent by God. He who worketh good out of evil," she murmured. "Thy will be done, Amen!"

And with this supreme act of renunciation, there came a peaceful blessing as if from heaven over her countenance, and over the worn out, suffering body, fell the blessedness of that profound slumber that so often heralds approaching dissolution.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONSPIRACY.

NEALE VOLAND left his bride and Hazlehurst, on the day succeeding that marriage which he expected would add to his prestige as a society man, in a state of baffled rage difficult to describe. Social prominence was of the greatest importance to him, and in fact his one special desire was to be considered a brilliant ornament to society. His tastes were too fastidious and exclusive to give large entertainments; but to gather around him a select circle of *gourmets*, invited to discuss a choice *déjeuner à la fourchette* or a tempting *petit-souper*, now and then to lead a German, preside over the Terrapin Club, enter a horse at the races, bet a trifle, gamble a trifle, know the best wines, and how to drink them (a real science which few master), to sail a yacht, to ride well, handle the reins with skill, talk horse, enunciate and dress *à l'anglicé*—these were some of his various accomplishments.

A man of the world must take lessons of all nations. He must bow and eat like a Frenchman, dress and talk and ride like an Englishman; be as diplomatic as an Italian, as proud as a Spaniard, as arrogant as a German, and as profuse as an American.

If he aspire to be an immense swell, it will be well

to find time to skim over the magazines, mildly sneer at religion, and affect Oriental philosophy, which a vocabulary of twenty words will enable him to do, and it has a grand sound to use a learned terminology on special occasions. He must always seem indifferent, never by any mischance be in earnest, eschew as fatal to social brilliancy any leaning toward what is called religion, speak of orthodox marriage as the exploded tyranny of the dark ages, and set aside for the sparkling theories of the present day all the ideas of the past as effete.

The world moves, and we walk free on a very high plane in the broad light of the nineteenth century. Of course no one ever slips down from theoretical stilts to any commonplace level. Certainly Neale Voland was not so stupid as even to confound theory and practice, or make of the one any logical sequence from the other.

He had inherited an ample fortune which had been scarcely equal to the demand on his social position, but his means were somewhat enhanced by his marriage with Miriam, who held a life interest in a fine real estate which was to go to her son in fee simple at her death.

After he had sent Miriam away to live at the manse, he had barely provided for her subsistence, so that the greater part of her income had assisted to meet his own luxurious requirements. But when a short time previous he had procured the divorce that enabled him to marry the heiress of Hazlehurst, he had expected that this new alliance would bring such a large addition to

means that were scarcely equal to meet his style of living, that he would not feel the loss of Miriam's modest property. So that the failure of his plans, also involved a money loss he found it difficult to meet.

Mr. Sly, the senior of the firm of lawyers who had procured the divorce, had also become the business agent of Miriam, who in fact took no heed as to how her wants were supplied, or whence any remittance came.

Finally, all needed sums were sent directly to the woman in charge of the manse, who had been placed there by Mr. Sly himself, and was entirely amenable to his directions.

As Neale Voland's affairs now stood, he was really a poorer man than before his divorce from Miriam, and the consequent loss of her income. This uncomfortable state of things added greatly to his exasperation.

Yet beyond all money loss he dreaded to encounter those covert sneers of the world, whose force he could perfectly measure, and which he well knew would greet him during the near approaching social season.

It was now November, and before many weeks the round of festivities would commence, when he must take his place as a social leader, and hear all the false and fair phrases of seeming condolence, but of real sarcasm, that would be heaped upon him.

He knew full well, for was he not a part of that very social circle? what a monstrous sham its conventionalities were! and that it exacted first, last, and always, but one test—success.

People of fashion have no time nor inclination to examine causes, criticise means employed, or analyze motives. All this is too irksome, but the world does demand of its votaries, a prosperous issue of their undertakings. Those who enter this charmed circle must come prepared to add to the common pleasure, to dwell in sunshine and a round of gayeties.

Why should mistakes, misfortunes, or failures be tolerated there?

And Neale Voland determined that Paulina should either accept the obligations she had assumed, or be sacrificed if she persisted in her refusal to live with him. Exactly how to accomplish his purpose he did not as yet know, but he was ready to attempt any plan that promised to secure him from the scornful jests of his associates.

In this dilemma, when the fertility of his own invention seemed at fault, he bethought himself of one whom he detested, but who had been so very useful to him, that notwithstanding his exorbitant charges, and the dreaded consequent drain upon his already somewhat depleted purse, he yet decided once more to consult. This man was none other than the Mr. Caleb Sly, whom Paulina employed, and whom Neale Voland had applied to some years previous, regarding an evident incompatibility between himself and Miriam.

The suggestion had originated with that amiable gentleman, of sending that unfortunate lady quietly to an isolated place, where it would be expedient to detain

her until such time as might be found most convenient to institute a suit for divorce.

This discreet advice had been, as we have seen, very much to the point, and Neale Volland was quite pleased with the result.

To be sure, Miriam's plaintive little notes made him at first feel quite uncomfortable, yet the passing sentimentalism thus evoked, was nothing in comparison with the absolute relief of getting an ailing and nervous wife put aside in a way that society, as the matter was explained, accepted as satisfactory. Indeed, Neale was ever an object of interest and sympathy in a certain circle on account of the prolonged indisposition of his wife, which sympathy was especially exhibited, when he now and then delicately alluded to his lonely home.

Then some women pitied him, and said, "It was very sad to see a handsome young man endure such a trial, which he bore like a moral hero without making anyone uncomfortable on his account," while others went still farther and hinted, "That it was very selfish for a sickly woman to stay sick that way; it was better to die at once, and give others a chance to make a man happy."

Neale was satisfied, and having conceived the bright idea, after a time, not to trouble himself to open Miriam's letters at all, as their effect was depressing, he presently found his free and easy life quite suited to his taste, and was content to let matters stand as they were, when the sudden passion for Paulina made him desirous of obtaining nominal as well as absolute freedom.

Recalling the former service of Mr. Sly, he at once laid his case a second time before him, when he learned, to his great satisfaction, that five years of separation having elapsed, he could readily procure a divorce from Miriam on the ground of her willful desertion. This plea had several advantages, too, over that of incompatibility, as it would procure for him the sympathetic consideration of society, which must at once perceive the delicate artifice of ill-health, by which he had tried for so many years to condone her conduct before the world.

Besides, as Miriam would never know of the legal proceedings instituted, the needed requirements of the law for a case of willful absence could so readily be met. Her continued staying away, her obstinate silence, even after due publication of the facts in her case, made her clearly and constructively guilty, and relieved him of all responsibility as to the separation. It was as Mr. Sly complacently remarked, when he informed his client that the suit had been granted, "as pretty a case, and as neatly carried through, as any divorce suit out of the scores he had procured." So Neale Voland was pronounced legally divorced from his wife, "she having abandoned him for five years together, with willful obstinate and continued desertion." "Did heaven ratify the judgment?"

Now recalling all this, and how smoothly the course of his recent true love had sailed into matrimonial seas when Caleb Sly stood at the helm as pilot, he felt that

he again needed his aid, to bring the haughty beauty thus wooed and won to terms.

Thus, suddenly starting from the prolonged revery, which had been duly noted by the watchful Hermann, he hastily gave the order for his coupé "to be brought out at once to the door; and the valet who was exceedingly quick in all his movements, presently made the announcement, that the carriage was ready. As Neale Voland was about to step into the coupé, he happened to observe that this man had taken the place of his footman, and held the door for him. "Fellow!" he said in a curt way, "what means this officious service? Where is Blaise?"

The man made a cringing bow, saying in an undertone, "I thought it safest sir, recalling the prying interference of the *Eagle* into your affairs, to accompany you myself so as to guard you against a similar mishap."

"True, true, thanks," answered Neale, flushing at the mortifying reminder of that important society notice in the *Eagle*, which was so evidently the work of some spy.

As the valet, gently closed the carriage door, and Neale sank back into a corner of its cushioned depths, well screened by the crimson silk curtain, that the thoughtful valet had unlooped, he said to himself.

"Who the devil is this fellow anyhow? He serves me with such extraordinary zeal that I mistrust him. What can he expect to make by it? Of course he has some mercenary plan in his head, and I'll bet it's a deep

laid one. He has a German name, but he speaks English better than half the society swells, a deuced sight too well, for a foreigner. Let me see, how did I pick him up? Oh, yes, I remember answering his advertisement which had a grand sound, 'speaks seven languages' he said. It was a risky thing to have done."

It was a half hour's drive from the fashionable part of the town, where Neale Voland's handsome house stood, to the business part of the city, where Sly and Pry had their offices.

Their ante-room was as usual crowded, but Hermann tapped at Mr. Sly's private door, and that gentleman opened it with a frown, which immediately changed to a gracious smile, as he bade him "beg his master to come up."

As these gentlemen met, they shook hands with such earnest manifestations of pleasure, that they did not notice that the valet quietly took his place in a small private corridor back of the offices, seeming to close the door, while in fact he left it so that it could very readily be pushed slightly ajar without attracting attention.

"Delighted to see you," exclaimed Mr. Sly, rubbing his hands together, in the excess of his satisfaction, which for once was genuine.

"Can't say I am exactly glad to come back, Sly," said Voland, in a dogged way, quite unlike his customary suavity.

"Not *another* divorce suit, eh?" suggested the law-

yer, in a provoking tone that indicated such a probability.

“Well, not exactly, not yet,” replied Neale in an embarrassed way.

“Really! Can’t imagine in that case to what fortunate circumstance I am indebted for the *honor*,” said Sly, with a slight stress on the last word. “But pray be seated,” he at once added, placing for his client an easy revolving chair near his own, in readiness for any confidential communication.

Just as Neale sat down, a door softly opened, swinging on easy hinges, as did all the doors of this office, and the twinkling eyes of Mr. Pry were just visible for one moment, then withdrawn.

Slight as was this movement, Sly noticed it and frowned, but Neale Volland was not aware of any interruption.

As the lawyer remained silent, with an air of attention, the client had to open his case.

“I am here again,” said he, “as you may suppose, to obtain legal advice, although I must say that I find it rather an expensive process.”

“If sir,” interrupted the senior partner, with an air of offended dignity, “you deem the laborer not worthy of his hire, there are other gleaners in the same field.”

“Well, let that pass,” said Neale Volland. “You are the one to bind together my golden sheaves. It’s neither here nor there, Sly; I need your aid a deuced

sight more than I did at first; for after you managed that little affair for me so neatly, being a gay fellow, and free, I married again."

"I have heard something of this," said the attorney; "pray allow me heartily to congratulate you, my dear sir."

"Pray, not quite so fast," replied the bridegroom, sulkily. "Were I a fit person to congratulate I would scarcely be here as a client."

The lawyer resumed his usual attitude of profound attention.

Neale Voland continued: "I married a young, beautiful, and wealthy, orphan girl, who had just attained her legal majority. The wedding was an odd affair, but let that pass; we were married."

"Legitimately married, as a client of ours had it," said Sly, laughing a little, as he recalled the queer phrase.

"He should have rather sworn that he was permanently married," answered Voland, smiling. "But just here comes the complication. This beautiful bride of mine has spirit enough for seven shrews, and I was so silly as not to know her mettle. When I announced to her, an hour after the marriage ceremony, that I was a divorcé, she lapsed into a sentimental rhapsody on the subject, and in one word flatly refused to live with me on account of my being a divorced man."

"And what next?" asked Mr. Sly, with a positive leer lurking in the corners of his half closed eyes.

“What next?” groaned the client. “She has fled, God knows where, and now I shall stand before the world like a born idiot, divorced from one wife whom I have made oath has deserted me, and having been really deserted by the other. Next thing I suppose,” added he affecting to laugh, “it will be said that I am the original Blue Beard from whom every woman flies.”

The hilarious attorney leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily. He really did laugh loud and long, and his client was furious. Voland sprang to his feet with an oath, for he heard the echo of the world’s laugh in that derisive voice, and it galled him to the quick. But at the very next instant he sat down again, promising to himself to be even with the rascal at a more convenient time. Was it not, thought he, more endurable that a mean fellow like Sly should amuse himself, than to endure the killing scorn of his equals. So down he sat, very quiet and dignified, which at once had its effect upon the diverted Mr. Sly, who checking his mirth, said:

“Beg pardon sir, the picture of a modern Blue Beard, that your skill presented to my mental vision, was so very droll. Now seriously, what can I do for you?”

“Gad,” replied Neale, “that is just what I wish you to tell me. I must find her of course.”

“That is an easy matter,” answered the attorney, “we lawyers know all the hidden movements of the world. Men and women are mere puppets in our hands.

Why do you wish to know where your fugitive bride has gone?"

"I intend," said Neale Voland in a decisive way, "to compel her to return — of course legally, you know" — added he chuckling.

"Of course, legally," echoed Mr. Sly, "yet," suggested he, "what if she will not return, or returning will not live with you? This is a free country, sir."

Neale Voland's face grew dark, and his husky voice showed his anger, as he fairly hissed one word, "*Vengeance.*"

The face of the supple attorney also betrayed an intense feeling, and for a short space of time he leaned back in his office chair evidently in deep thought.

At last he spoke, "Did you not mention, Mr. Voland, that her reason for refusing to remain with you was some fanciful objection on her part, as to your being a divorcé?"

"I did," replied he; "the jade has enough silly romance on that score, stuffed into her pretty little noddle, to set a man crazy."

"But what," said the lawyer speaking slowly, "if that wall is torn down?"

"You speak in riddles," answered the client.

"In plain words, Neale Voland," replied Mr. Sly emphatically, "You are no longer a divorced man. She who was your wife, is dead."

"Dead! Poor Miriam dead!" groaned her betrayer, as the upbraiding past rose before him, as a sheeted

ghost. He divined, he knew, who and what had murdered her. Strange contrarities of the human heart! One hour ago he had cursed her between his ground teeth, because she did not die, because she dared to stand in his way by continuing to live. And what was it, now, that his wishes were realized, and her purified spirit had taken its flight heavenward, that so dismayed him? He fell back in his chair, covered his face with his hands, and could not conceal his emotion. The subtle attorney gloated upon the picture of distress presented with diabolical joy; for this was a curious study of the human heart portrayed for his inspection, and to sound the depths of the weaknesses and the contradictions of human nature was one of his favorite pastimes. In that moment of bitter introspection, Neale Voland began to feel some of those mental tortures henceforth to be his. It is said "There is a worm that never dies," but this is one of many musty legends. What should a gay man of the world have to do with that cruel handmaid of memory, remorse? Thought travels over the immensity of space, with the rapidity of that omnipotence from which it emanates, and a lifetime may be compressed in a moment. So Neale Voland felt the old power of Miriam's lustrous, glad eyes, as they beamed upon him in response to his first protestations of lifelong devotion; then he beheld her as his gentle, loving, all-confiding wife, and next as the joyful mother of a beautiful boy, when, alas! came the shadow of loss of health. On his part, there had been no sympathy for her suffering,

only a base and utter selfishness that made her helplessness wearisome. And the boy? What a wretch he was! Even paternal affection had been stifled by his huge egotism.

“What of the boy?” he at last inquired.

“You will remember,” replied his counsel, “that the mother deserted with the boy.”

“Yes, yes,” responded he, hurriedly. “I asked you *where* is the boy? You seem to know all about them.”

Hereupon Mr. Sly replied with painfully slow precision, as if bent upon prolonging the torture of his victim:

“Your son, sir, is at present taken care of by your newly wedded wife. Miriam, it seems, died in her arms, and solemnly bequeathed her the child” —

“Great God!” cried the horrified man, “I am lost. Paulina will now, I am sure, never consent to live with me. I know her temper but too well.”

“You are quite right,” replied the candid attorney. “In fact, she says she never will.”

“And *you!*” exclaimed Voland, turning fiercely upon him. “How should *you* know what she says?”

“By a letter,” replied the attorney very quietly, “that I have received from Mrs Brown, who was left in charge of Marion at the manse. When your divorce was procured, Mr. Voland, you well remember that I, very reluctantly, consented to assume the charge of her business affairs. Indeed, when you first sent your wife to the manse, I provided a suitable matron to take charge

of her and her son, as they were helpless and quite unable to take care of themselves. Your wife was at that time already a confirmed invalid, and your child two years of age. That was five years ago. You have been so absorbed in pleasant occupations, as doubtless to have forgotten these dates, but I have exercised a constant care over my ward ever since."

Every measured word of this uncalled for recapitulation inflicted severe pain, as the cruel narrator meant it should, upon Neale Voland.

"And my child," he said, "now inherits a fine estate through his mother, in fee simple. He must have a guardian."

"The Honorable Court has already appointed me to fill that place," replied Mr. Sly with much modesty.

"Appointed *you*, as guardian of *my* son!" exclaimed the dismayed father with amazement. "And this, without even consulting me! Can such things be?"

"Mr. Voland," replied the lawyer in a hurt way, "this action was kindly intended by me, in order to save you any possible annoyance. I have your own note requesting me to arrange any business matters, relating to Miriam's affairs, written at the time of the granting the divorce. I had only to exhibit this note of yours, to the court, and I was appointed guardian."

"Fool, fool that I am," muttered Voland; "and Paulina, how can you explain her finding Miriam?"

"Mr. Voland," remarked Mr. Sly, with severity, "I am not here to submit to a categorical examination.

You came here sir, so you informed me, in order to consult as to the best means of avoiding an open scandal, in consequence of the desertion of your second wife. Shall we confer on that point? I beg to remind you that my time is scarcely my own, for, as you must be aware, other clients are in waiting."

"The question, sir," answered Neale Voland, suppressing his indignation, "is to so place my present wife as to exonerate me before the world."

"I comprehend," responded the lawyer, as calmly as if he were about to propose some pleasure excursion. "Suppose, for instance, we confine her in an insane asylum. Nothing is easier. You will thus have absolute control over her property, and she will doubtless then capitulate on your own terms."

"Sly!" said Voland, with a fixed, stony stare, "I do believe you are the devil."

"Scarcely so ancient or honorable a personage as your compliment would imply," said the other laughing, "but I may be a not inefficient aide, and under whose colors, pray, are you enlisted, Squire Voland?"

"I," coughed he — "I am outdone."

"Perhaps undone?" hinted Sly.— "But seriously, it will be very easy to prove your bride insane. You admit that her bridal arrangements were very eccentric."

"Egad! I can swear to that," cried the bridegroom, with a gleam of hatred in his eyes, for the evil spirit, at first half invited, had now entered his soul and taken possession of his will.

“Then,” continued the lawyer, “you must at once repair to the manse, accompanied by two physicians. Pay them well and they will give you a certificate that she is a lunatic. Thereupon take her immediately to an asylum. Any application on behalf of a wife from her husband, thus supported, will be readily received. I would advise you to provide liberally for a large and handsome room and proper attendance. Doubtless the same Mrs. Brown who had Miriam in charge for five years, could be induced for a suitable compensation to become the nurse of Paulina. It will be a less doleful place for the good woman than the manse has been, and will prove a recuperative change of air,” whereat he gave one of his sardonic little laughs.

Neale Voland listened half dazed, yet eagerly clutching at all the advantages offered. First, there would be a large accession to his means, as he could thus control her property.

Secondly, he would become an envied object of the sympathetic consideration of society, as one blameless, but unfortunate.

Women of fashion would lavish caresses upon so romantic a victim, whose bride became insane on her wedding day; but beyond all, and the tiger in his heart gave a great bound of savage exultation, there was revenge.

“But,” inquired Voland, “where am I to find the two doctors?” and a shadow of doubt passed over his face.

“As an act of friendship,” said Mr. Sly slowly, “I will consent to act as one of the physicians.”

“You!” exclaimed Neale Voland, in renewed astonishment.

“Yes,” said Sly coolly, “I at one time studied medicine, and obtained a diploma to practice, but later on I concluded that it would be more interesting and remunerative to become a divorce lawyer, yet I confess that I am for the nonce perplexed. I can, upon an emergency, appeal to my junior, Mr. Pry, to assume medical honors, but I would prefer a genuine member of the faculty for the work before us, as we always consider every question in its purely legal aspect, and in this case we must have two doctors.”

At this instant Hermann opened the door and entered the room.

“Egad, fellow,” cried his master in a rage, “how do you dare?”

“Beg pardon,” pleaded the valet, with his usual cringing bow, “I thought I was sent for, and just as I opened the door—indeed I beg a thousand pardons, but I thought I heard the gentleman say that a physician was needed in some case. Now, I am a graduate of a German Medical University, and will be most happy to assist in any consultation. I flatter myself, sirs, that you will find me equal to *any emergency*,” and he laid special stress on the last words.

Neale Voland was about to make an angry reply, when the more discriminating Mr. Sly, rising, very

politely offered him a chair, saying, "I am happy, sir, to meet with a learned member of the faculty. Kindly be seated."

Whereupon, Hermann very deliberately took the proffered chair.

"Your full name, if you please, Doctor?" asked the astute lawyer.

"Herr Hermann Luftschlöffen," instantly responded he.

"You speak English remarkably well for a German," casually observed Mr. Sly.

"My mother was an Englishwoman," quietly replied the man; "but as to that matter, when Mr. Voland engaged my services some months ago, I mentioned to him that I could speak seven languages."

"That is so," said that gentleman.

"Permit me to inquire," remarked Mr. Sly, "why so accomplished a man engaged as a valet——"

"*Pour cause!*" said the man, slightly shrugging his broad shoulders; then added, frankly, "The fact is, gentlemen (and I take it for granted we speak confidentially), I may as well admit that I was a medical student, but am now a political exile."

"Egad!" exclaimed his master.

"Perhaps a Nihilist?" interrogated Mr. Sly, persistently.

A smile of derision overspread the face of the man. "Nihilist? No. Revolutionist? Yes. Nihilism only knows how to destroy. We have higher and broader

ends in view. We would subvert the present order of things, and out of the ruins build up the world's commonwealth. Poets have dreamed our dreams! Philosophers have speculated on our theories. We are Pantisocrats. Our science involves a view of all the departments of human knowledge. At present, gentlemen, you behold in me—a martyr to science.”

“You will do,” said Mr. Sly, dryly. “To-morrow, then, Mr. Voland, we three gentlemen (and he emphasized the ‘we’) will depart for the manse.”

“I knew,” soliloquized that able attorney, as he bowed out his coadjutors, “that the rascal had been eavesdropping and had our secret. But the devil has sent him in the nick of time, when he was needed”—— Now, Sly, play your cards, old fellow, as well as you shuffle them, and you'll win trumps. Paulina will die sooner than marry that wretch, and once in the asylum, I can soon get her out, when she will be eternally grateful to me. Humph! I'll get her out if she will marry me, and if she won't—why, let her stay there for a lunatic.”

But there was still one other, who repeated, “If I save her, she will be eternally grateful, and marry me——”

Sly started. “What strange whispering was that? or was I dreaming? Was it ‘such stuff as dreams are made of?’ Aha! wake up, Sly!”

CHAPTER VIII.

TANGLED THREADS.

THE last days of November closed in bleak and wintry, and as bitter cold on the mountain top as is mid-winter in the plains below.

Already a heavy snow had fallen, and the air was full of the penetrating chilliness that betokens the coming winter storm.

The freezing winds swept wildly over the spot where the old manse stood, they coursed madly with wanton swirl under its projecting eaves, rushed with rude violence against the big chimney top, whose hoarse throat responded with hollow moan, or skurried through every gaping crevice, filling the rambling house with mysterious whisperings, then died away in plaintive, almost human cries in the far distance. In the brightest days of midsummer, the manse at best was cheerless and wore a menacing look, as if built to deter rather than to invite approach, and all around it on this skyey acclivity, pinnacled crags frowned like huge ramparts, adding to the threatening, desolate aspect of the place.

The crusty, cranky, miserly man, who had half a century since made of this grim dwelling a living tomb, seemed to have infused the encysted hardness of his grasping nature into its very stones.

It was whispered that the spot was uncanny, and that the sordid spirit still lingered earth-bound, held down by fiery chains, to the money-bags over which he had gloated during his miserable life. In that portion of the house which he had inhabited, there was a peculiar musty odor, as if from the dampness of unventilated vaults, and strange sounds had certainly been heard, by the few persons who had ventured to remain over night in the octagon chamber which the old man had always occupied.

For many years he had secluded himself in this room, and often for months at a time, the solitude of his hermitage was not disturbed. Finally, he was no more heard of, but whither he had gone, or what the cause of his disappearance no man could tell.

There are lives that rotate for a period round some physical axis, then suddenly fade away out of sight, lost like the plunging shooting star in an unfathomable abyss.

There are lives now being calmly lived out, in seemingly narrow grooves; destined suddenly to be extinguished in some dark, mysterious way, whose fateful blotting out, alone invests them with a romantic interest.

And so it was that this man, who had virtually cut himself off from all communion with his race, who had of his own free will severed the sweet links that bind souls with endearing ties, and who, in his relations to humanity had made himself a nonentity, became, through

the mystery of his vanishing from sight, an interesting object of search.

At first there were suspicions that he might have been foully dealt with, on account of the amassed treasures he was thought to have accumulated, and officers of the law were sent to examine the house, but no trace of the missing man could ever be found; nor any, not even the least evidence of hoarded wealth.

So people at last came to the conclusion that this strange ending was but the natural sequence of an eccentric life, and that the stories of hidden stores were mere inventions. Yet his whimsical conduct had indicated a fear of some violent taking off.

The octagon room, where he had so persistently shut himself up, was a solidly built inner apartment, with the exception of one outside wall. The openings in this wall that served for windows were but small apertures, set high and closely secured by iron grating. This prison was paneled in wood, and had an exceedingly deep open fire-place, that had no corresponding outside vent, but communicated by an interior flue with another chimney. This peculiar construction was one of the oddities of the house, and must at any time have produced a very imperfect draught for the egress of smoke.

But for many years after the disappearance of its owner, the manse had been uninhabited, or if casually visited by those whose curiosity led them to inspect the house, this particular room had rather been avoided,

not only on account of its dismal construction, but also because everyone had an indefinable feeling of repulsion regarding it. Is it an idle fancy that causes some places to inspire one with secret apprehension and vague dislike, or does a magnetic influence really infiltrate all substances, and leave throughout nature a written record, affecting our perceptions in a way we feel, but fail to understand? The writing is there, although we may not read its meaning, just as the universe is but one vast symbol of the creator, although we may never grasp the ideas represented. Thus the air we breathe, the earth we tread, the rocks that rise before us, the houses we occupy, the very furniture we use, have received certain impressions which in turn they transmit. This is a sentiment generally recognized, and often even expressed by matter-of-fact people who would be ashamed to acknowledge any vagary of the imagination, but who will all unconsciously exclaim regarding some venerable piece of furniture which has been handed down through several generations, "Oh, if this could only speak, what a story it would tell!"

But the mute embodiment utters no sound, and the story is never told.

Thus it was with the history of the old manse, if aught there was to divulge, it remained hidden.

One person indeed, who had been sent there on several occasions, had questioned the sphinx.

This was none other than Mr. Obadiah Pry, of Sly and Pry, who during those dreadful five years of poor

Miriam's imprisonment, had paid several visits there, to arrange matters of business with the Mrs. Brown, whom Sly had placed in charge of the place and its inmates.

This gentleman, who had an investigating turn of mind, had made an extremely careful inspection, so far as his limited time would permit, of the peculiarities of the building. But, unfortunately, he was always so hurried, that his painstaking examinations had only been partially successful. Yet the discoveries that rewarded his diligence were so curious, that he felt quite sure there were still other things to be unraveled, and he promised to amuse himself at his earliest leisure, in a more patient study of the surroundings.

Yet he was too mistrustful, and far too prudent, to communicate this information to any one, and least of all, to his senior partner Mr. Caleb Sly.

Trust and mistrust, was his paradoxical motto, as regarded his relations with that astute individual, which could be thus explained in a satisfactory manner. His partnership rested on a theory of trust, but his absolute knowledge of the way in which their business was conducted, caused him to mistrust. So it came to pass that among other things, the junior knew considerably more about the architectural freaks of this building than did his shrewd senior.

Then there was Mrs. Brown, the respectable matron, who had preceded Miriam's coming, and arranged for her reception the more inhabitable portion of the house. After the arrival of mother and child, she had served

them three meals a day, the best she could prepare under such unfavorable circumstances. She was neither kind nor unkind to her wards, during the weary length of time in which she was their custodian. But she preserved an unvarying silence, that was more oppressive than could have been the most voluble manifestations of dislike. She was a small, shriveled old woman, with beetle brows, and eyebrows heavily shaded, that grew into each other without any intervening space. Her deep-set eyes were expressionless, and the uniformity of the lines above them gave her countenance a heavy look.

As Miriam became more feeble and nervous, she grew to have an almost childish dread of this poor old soul, which her son noticing with quick observation, the dear child sought to guard his mother against the intrusion. He marked the times of her coming to them with food, and would listen for her step, when he would meet her on the threshold and receive from her whatever she brought. Nor did the aged creature take any offense at such a proceeding, for it rather suited her own shy disposition to be let alone. It was evident that some cruel repression had weighed upon her life, and borne so heavily upon it as to hermetically close her mind and heart against the ordinary emotions of daily life.

She seemed ever to be in fear of a presence that might at any moment appear, and yet to be possessed of a deep desire, that some one might come who never came. And so she dragged on, year after year, in a state of

mingled hope and despair, not unlike that which agitated Miriam herself, only in her case, cruel force had deadened the very sources of emotion. Thus these two women endured each according to the full measure of their nature, a living death in this gloomy old house. But Miriam had passed away, and her mortal remains reposed amid the dead of her race, in a small burying-ground adjoining the manse, on this elevated platform of mountain summit.

The coming of Paulina and Nora had been announced by a letter from Mr. Caleb Sly, whose orders the crone most implicitly obeyed, in which he directed her to take them in special charge, to humor their wishes as far as possible, but by no means to allow them to receive any visitors; or, if perchance any one came, to report proceedings faithfully to him. The tone of the letter was mandatory and even threatening. In other words they were to be guarded as Miriam had been, only a greater care was to be exercised in providing for their comfort.

Mr. Obadiah Pry consented to take this important communication in person, and also to see that various articles of luxury were added to the meagre appointments of Paulina's apartment. This visit had been made only the day previous to Paulina's arrival, but so quietly, that even the child had not been aware of his having been there; he having entered and departed by a secret passageway only known to himself, the better to escape observation.

Consequently there was, on the part of Mrs. Brown, no interference with the movements of either Paulina or Nora.

She continued, as was her wont, to appear but for a moment, much to Nora's surprise, depositing the meals prepared on the nearest table, and making an instant exit.

Nora had never before met with a silent woman, and she looked upon her with real compassion.

"The poor, dear craythur," she would say, shaking her head mysteriously, "it's spacheless she is—the more's the pity. An' I wud rayther hev' a bee in me bonnet nor stan' widout me tongue ter wag in me head. Blist, an' it's a sorry sight, to see a he, nor mostwise a she, so afflicted."

These comments, and many more of the same kind, were always made in a loud tone of voice to Mrs. Brown, as if with the amiable intention of piercing her deafness if possible—but as that individual made no sign whatever when thus addressed, Nora was now fully convinced that the woman was a mute. Acting upon this happy idea, she never by any accident got a glimpse of her, that she did not at once indulge in the most extraordinary pantomime, and as even these demonstrations were disregarded, her gesticulations became each day more and more complicated.

Notwithstanding these determined efforts, no communication was ever effected with that unimpressionable being. As Miriam sank rapidly after that sad day

of their first meeting, both the dear child and Paulina were too deeply absorbed with their loving attendance upon the dying woman, to take any heed of Nora's queer manifestations to Mrs. Brown. * * *

The tragedy was at an end, the sacrifice of an innocent life consummated, and the dead buried by the kind offices of the good farmer, who had brought Paulina to Timber Ridge.

This man afterwards passed by almost daily, always stopping as he did so to bawl out at the top of his voice, "Halloo the house!" which he continued until Nora appeared to answer his questions.

He formed their sole communication with the outer world, and faithful Mrs. Brown, in pursuance with her explicit instructions, hastened out with Nora, always standing stock-still beside her, until the man left.

But Nora, who was possessed with the idea that she was a mute, began also to consider her as an imbecile, and so paid no heed to any of the woman's actions.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" she would say, standing in front of her and tapping her own head significantly, "its clane daft she is."

So it happened that Mrs. Brown knew without any difficulty all their intentions as soon as they were formed, through Nora's indiscreet and confidential talks with the farmer, to which she listened attentively.

Some ten days or more had sped their course since Miriam's death. The grief of the beautiful boy which

at first had been so passionate as to endanger his life, was subsiding into a settled sadness, if possible more painful to behold in a child, than the wild outburst of his first frenzy.

Paulina, who had reverently accepted from the dying mother the sacred charge and care of her darling baby, was more preoccupied with the sweet and tender trust confided to her, than with reflections about her own situation. She soon realized the absolute need, if she would save the precious child, of a speedy change of place and scene.

In his interest, and for his dear sake, she resolved to overcome any repugnance she might feel about returning home, and so, greatly to Nora's delight, it was decided to return to Hazlehurst with the child.

Nora was busy perfecting the needful arrangements for their near departure, with their friend, the farmer, who was to drive them back to the station, from whence the journey to Hazlehurst could be easily made.

Mrs. Brown did not fail to keep Mr. Caleb Sly duly informed of all these plans, and it was his accurate knowledge of their approaching departure, that decided him to mature his own schemes as rapidly as possible, and leave at once with his associates for Timber Ridge.

* * * * *

For some days past the quivering, muffled winds, like some savage monster raging in his gelid den, eager to lay waste the helpless earth, had swept in fitful wintry blasts around the manse, but now, gaining

strength as the elements combined to usher in the gathering storm, there sprang forth with sullen bound from the boisterous northeast, a strong and steady gale, laden with heavy humors and with frozen breath obscuring all the sky.

The sun set, a gloomy orb, as if affrighted out of sight, hidden from view by mountain waves of troubled, surging clouds. And thus the night was ushered in with tumult, dark girt around with terror.

Nora had been very busy for several hours, and Paulina's preparations were quite completed for their departure on the morrow.

The same trusty farmer, who had brought them thither, had engaged to take them away in a large comfortable sleigh, lined with sheep-skins, and Paulina, who was terrified at the violence of the mountain storm, and anxious to try for the dear child, the effect of the pleasing change to her own luxurious, cheerful home, was well content that they were going to leave.

There had also been a hurried movement all that day within the usually quiet house, for Mrs. Brown, suddenly galvanized by some powerful action, became so very restless as even to attract Nora's attention. She nervously flitted from room to room, opening up musty places, that had never before been disturbed by her, then closing them again, and even glancing in upon them from time to time. This uneasiness of hers went on increasing, until Nora, who began to observe her actions with much curiosity, felt quite sure that she had

now gone quite out of her mind, so that whenever the poor woman re-appeared, she was saluted with the exclamation "daft, clane daft." Yet amid all her evident agitation, never once did she speak one word, either of assent or dissent.

Thus the eventful day wore on to its turbulent close.

The heavy wooden shutters were at last fastened for the night with strong iron bolts, the outer door well secured, and night drew on apace.

The log of wood which had been all ablaze, now smoldered in the deep-set open fireplace, throwing out so little heat from its yawning mouth, that Paulina, the child and Nora, were seated on the wooden settle, within the recessed fireplace. It was as if the once congealed heart of the forest's monarch that had reared its lofty head defiant of these very wintry storms, but now cut down and prostrate, had shot forth angry flames ere it died away of fierce protest against such wanton destruction.

The glimmering scattered rays of light, scarcely reached out into the far corner of the long, low room, where was the couch upon which Miriam had so lately struggled with the angel of Death. Now and then, a flickering gleam filled the room as with a presence, then subsided into feeble shadow. The drooping child laid his languid head against Paulina's compassionate heart, and his pale face, spiritualized by grief, looked so innocent and pure, half hidden by its encircling wealth of flaxen ringlets.

Neale knew that this was to be his last night at the old home, where his saddened baby life had taken on the semblance of age, in its sorrowful experiences. It was plain that his thoughts lingered in the past, and were with his idolized mother, for every now and then, he raised his little head, cast a hurried, half startled look towards the bed, then hid his face with his hands clasped over his eyes, as if to shut out too sad a sight, then drew still closer to Paulina.

At this, she would stoop and kiss his hair, stroke out the mass of tangled curls with dainty touch, and soothe the fair boy with tender, soft caress.

There had been a prolonged silence, for Paulina's thoughts were very busy, and Nora was tired out, when little Neale asked with a faint sob.

“Must we leave mamma here?”

“My darling,” whispered Paulina, “she is not here. The beautiful part of her that loved you so, has gone to Heaven.”

“I do not like Heaven,” sighed he.

“Neale!” expostulated Paulina, “be but good and patient, and you will meet her there.”

“And will my naughty papa go too?” asked he.

“Only God knows the end,” answered Paulina.

“If,” said the boy, sitting up very straight, his infantile face expressing an angry flash of spirit, “if I thought *he* would dare”—and he shook a doubled-up tiny fist, as if beckoning back some invisible intruder.

At this precise moment, commingling with the in-

describable uproar of the elements without, was heard the sharp ring of horses hoofs, accompanied by a confusion of sounds, as if of the blustering voices of men.

Scarcely had this sudden outburst dismayed the affrighted women, when in quick succession came the clangor of the near and still nearer approach of men and horses.

Then Mrs. Brown, darting across the hall with rapid movement, drew back the creaking bolt, and threw wide open the great front door. As it swung upon its rusty hinges, it was hurled against the wall by the forceful fierceness of the furious storm.

Thus borne onward with the tempest's awful power, throughout the secret crevices of that sin-laden house, rushed in the howling demons that ride upon the shrieking blast—and the familiars of these wicked men took possession of this old manse, bringing with them still others, whose name is legion.

Yet, even in this woful hour, unmixed evil did not prevail, for there remained ready for strong and valiant conflict, the protecting power of good angels, the sure and ever faithful guardians of innocence. And woe betide those doomed souls, when to these shall be added the avenging ministers of God's justice!

Nor are such scenes imaginary myths, or nursery fables wherewith to startle children or amuse the credulous. For no one thing is more clearly written out in the pages of history, no hand-writing on the wall is more legible than the plain fact, that whenever the

measure of iniquity is heaped full and running over, even-handed retribution comes.

We do not always succeed in holding the untangled threads in this life; but we may rest assured that there exists no riddle unsolved in the hereafter, and what may we not dread for that nation, which persistently violates the great moral law, upon which rests the stability and the permanency of its foundation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

CROUCHED in a remote corner of the quaint hall, holding in her trembling hands a small lantern, whose dim, unsteady light scarce relieved the utter darkness around, poor Mrs. Brown cowered in an attitude of supplication.

At last she had reached that dread crisis, alike feared and hoped for, and she was in the very presence so long and so eagerly expected.

But oh, the cruel, cruel agony! The dastardly wretch never once vouchsafed to her imploring gaze, even a glance of recognition!

Scalding tears coursed down the furrowed channels of her withered cheeks, as she bent her hungry, wistful eyes upon one of the three men who had just entered.

But so strong was her habit of self-control, that even in that supreme moment no word of fond avowal gave utterance to the violence of her emotion.

And yet he saw it all, measured it all too with that keen subtle analysis, that never failed him. But from out of the depths of his malign heart, no responsive chord of pity, or of human affection, was touched.

Oh, how ineffably base, how unfeeling, how stony-

hearted! Is there in God's universe aught comparable to the savagery of a wicked man?

"Woman, what means this idiotic drivelling? lead the way," demanded Sly with a rasping sneer.

"To the miser's accursed room, where he walled himself in," ordered Voland.

"Ha, ha!" sardonically laughed Hermann, "we are here to divide his treasures," and so saying he caught the still open door with his sinewy grasp, and with strong and supple arm, slammed it with such power, that, in its closing, the oaken rafters rang again with a loud noise, that reverberated through every nook and corner of the startled house, and died away in manifold mysterious whispers and re-echoing jibes of, "we will divide his treasures."

The trio slowly ascended the creaking stairs, preceded by Mrs. Brown, whose tottering limbs almost refused to bear her weight, as clinging to the balustrade for support with one hand, she held the lantern with the other.

But Sly, seemingly impatient at the delay, rudely seized the dim light from her feeble hands, whispering to her as he did so:

"Fool, lock the door on the outside where she is, and leave the key within the lock."

The woman turned to obey, and stumbling down the stairs was soon lost to view.

In another moment Sly pushed open the door of the miser's bedchamber, from whence issued blinding smoke.

“The old Hecate,” snarled Sly, “I wrote her to have a good fire.”

“The curmudgeon clung to a bat’s cave,” said Neale Voland, as he entered, “but we’ll ventilate matters and see what a rousing fire and a roistering supper can do.”

“The hampers are in the hall below, I will bring them up,” said Hermann, and he groped his way down the rickety stairs again, toward the upper end of the hall, where Voland and Sly had pitched in everything, pell mell, on their arrival, leaving Hermann to stable the horses as best he could, in a deserted out-building near the house.

“I’ve half a mind,” mumbled he, “to take the upper hand myself. Only a niggardly thousand for this night’s work. But that dog Sly shall be a whipped cur, before I let him go; and as to that fool, Voland, after I’ve squeezed him dry, I can run away with his dainty bride—I’m tempted to play him that trick now—halloo, what have we got here?” cried he, as he stumbled over Mrs. Brown, who was crouched on the floor at the door of Paulina’s room, where Sly had sent her. He had evidently hurt her, for there was a low, involuntary moan.

“Be still, will you?” said he fiercely. “Raise a light here and let a man see where the hampers are.”

As if expecting some such summons, without saying a word, the old woman stretched forth her hand and turned outward the light side of a bull’s eye in the direction indicated.

“You’re a jewel,” said the man, turning to look at her, then adding with a coarse chuckle, “set in a toad’s head.” But he at once took in the situation as he saw the key in the outside of the door. Their prize was in that room, and this woman was on guard. He paused a moment, as if undecided whether to push aside the old creature and make away with the coveted prize then and there, trusting to the rich guerdon to be looked for from Paulina’s gratitude, or to play out his part as agreed upon.

“I’ll wait and take all chances in this deal,” again muttered he, as he stooped to pick up the various baskets and bundles, to carry them up-stairs.

The three men now busied themselves, without more ado, in preparations for a night’s revel.

Sly heaped on fagots of wood, that were piled up in the deep chimney corner, fanning them into a bright blaze, while Neale Voland critically examined, with the trained eye of a connoisseur, various bottles of wine and flasks of liquor, to make sure that they were in prime order, before commencing the gay revelry.

The fastidious man of fashion, the President of the Terrapin Club, was about to make a night’s orgy in strange company; he whose sparkling dinner-table talk and accomplished manners made the delight of fair women and the envy of vain men, whose fine voice and even occasional festive improvisations gave him a first place in prandial feasts. How he had fallen! About to hobnob with a miserable pettifogger, who had no pro-

fessional standing other than that of being a smart trickster, and with a low adventurer, his whilom valet! But, impelled by a thousand considerations of self-interest, and inspired by a fierce thirst for vengeance, he had taken that first step, from which he could not extricate himself. So, casting back any natural compunction that a gentleman might possibly feel, he tried only to think of the gastronomic pleasure he was about to indulge in.

“’Tis a freezing night,” said he, shivering. “We must mull this claret, although it’s a pity, too, to spoil its delicate flavor, and this fiery punch needs to be taken hot to warm a man; but we can chill this bottle of fine Amontillado up in the jail’s window here, and thus hope to preserve its exquisite aroma, and the Chablis may be placed on its side near at hand.”

Meanwhile Hermann dusted off an old deal table, carefully propped up its unreliable legs, and spread over the rough boards a white cloth, placing the most delicate viands upon the snowy surface, with as much care as if he were still a hired valet and not raised to the dignity of a conspirator in a damnable plot.

“Gentlemen,” said he when all was ready, “the dinner is served; be pleased to be seated.”

“We are a trinity of good fellows, and represent a unity of interest,” remarked Mr. Caleb Sly, as he took the place that Volland as amphitryon pointed out to him.

That gentleman, with a refinement of egotism perfectly understood in select circles, quietly established

himself in the most comfortable chair nearest the fire.

“*Doctor*, pray be seated,” he said to Hermann, emphasizing the titular distinction.

And that person, who was never troubled by any scruples of false modesty, pleasantly took the designated place.

After all, there was no lack of comradeship, for the three, each in his way, were very clever men. The spiced wines, the hot punch, the forced meats, united to do their mischievous work. Toasts topped off the bumpers, one upon the other, in quick succession, mingled with boisterous laughter and broad humor — until at last, Neale broke forth into an extemporized convivial song. His voice was pitched high, and resounded throughout the old manse. Perhaps, in his overheated brain, he fancied himself presiding over the Terrapin Club, for throwing back his handsome head, expanding his chest, and carelessly tapping time with the dexter thumb on the table, he sang:

Awake ye devils! and enshrine,
Our gods, in bottles of old wine,
Whose musty odors and *bouquet*,
Shall drive all sombre thoughts away!

May the dim shade of Epicure
Our gastronomic hits endure;
Let sparkling Chablis dull care kill,
We fill our goblets, drink at will.

Our feast transcends that wanton age,
When woman fair is all the rage,
Where wine and wit commingled flow:
Then gayly sings the courtly beau.

“Capital!” applauded both the men, “only,” suggested Sly, very slowly, with diabolic malice, “the alliteration of our host is incomplete. It always was, wit, wine, and — woman.”

“By the gods!” shouted Voland, as if crazed by some sudden impulse, “wit, wine and woman shall go together still. We will bring one, as mistress to this feast, fit to preside over an emperor’s banquet.”

All three sprang to their feet, but Voland, beckoning to them to be seated, hurriedly left the room.

A madman,” sneered Sly. “I’ll go after him — Doctor, stay where you are — presently I shall return,” and so saying, he hastened to follow Voland.

“A madman and a rascal,” added Hermann. “I’ll watch them both,” and, leaving the room on tiptoe, he glided along the dark corridor, to occupy himself with his favorite amusement of eavesdropping.

* * * * *

This fearful night was now well advanced, and at least three hours had elapsed since the terrified group in Miriam’s old room had been transfixed with horror, when the house was so suddenly taken possession of by these wicked men.

Paulina instantly comprehended that she was in mortal peril, as she successively heard and recognized their voices; and with the quickened perception of her danger, by one of those flashes of intelligence that often clear away mental doubt, she divined the nature of the

snare into which she had fallen, although of course she could not as yet measure its extent.

That the man Sly had sent her to this desolate spot, in order that she might meet poor Miriam, she had from the first understood after her arrival, although she could not understand the motives that had actuated him.

Mrs. Brown, too, had inspired her with mistrust, and had she not been so deeply interested in the fate of Miriam, and in the future of her lovely child, she probably would have been afraid to stay. But her noble unselfishness had detained her where she felt sure that Providence had sent her.

But now this same scheming man appeared to her in something approaching his true nature, and she felt that he was false to her and in some way leagued with Neale Volland, who sought to encompass her ruin. All these bitter thoughts were presented to her newly aroused imagination, but as the net-work of intrigue closed in around her, her soul rose equal to the dire extremity.

True heroism, like the century plant, may not reach its perfect bloom but once in a hundred years; and those who are heroic may live out their lives and fill obscure graves without the needed opportunity to develop that inherent quality; but when at last all conditions meet, and the fullness of time has come, then the perfected flower bursts forth to view.

Three hours of mortal anguish had passed in which Paulina's strained ear had caught every sound; she knew

when the sharp click of the lock turned a key in the door of their room on the outside, what that meant.

“We are prisoners in the hands of cruel men,” she whispered to Nora.

“Are you afraid, mamma?” the child asked. He had never before called her by that dearest of names to him, and now he did so as it were unconsciously.

“Yes, I am afraid Neale,” she replied, knowing that it was silly to try and deceive him. “What are we to do?” he whispered, clinging with arms folded around her neck.

“Look at Nora, Neale,” she answered, “and do as she does. *Pray.*”

From the first moment of uproar, Nora had fallen on her knees beside Paulina, and taking her rosary out of her pocket where she always carried it, she had never ceased to pray. She, too, knew that they were in deadly danger, and fast as hailstones pattered, fell the unending repetition of *pater* and *ave*. Thereupon, the almost baby-boy unclasped his hands with an awed look, and went down on his little knees beside the old nurse.

He did not know how to pray in set forms of words, but his heart was full of prayer. Then, faith and innocence united, arose like odorous incense before the Lord, and the sweetness thereof pierced the clouds; and Paulina began to be comforted and her first wild terror abated under the spell of the soothing influence.

Her undaunted spirit had regained its ascendancy over the first nervous shock. She was thus in a compara-

tively calm state of mind when the door was quickly unlocked, and Neale Voland entered the room.

His face was flushed and his gait slightly unsteady, as he opened the door.

The room was so imperfectly lighted by the faint glow of expiring embers, that he paused for an instant in the effort to familiarize objects somewhat indistinct.

Paulina, noticing his hesitation, instantly advanced to meet him. His presence had so enkindled her indignation as to banish all remaining trepidation.

She addressed him in tones of stinging contempt.

“At last, sir,” she said, “you have come! Long expected, and in this very room looked for by Miriam, day by day, hour by hour, month by month, year by year; while she, who fondly loved you and hoped for your coming, consumed away her precious life. At last the sum of your treachery was completed, the cup of her sorrows full and running over, when death came to release her from the suffering your barbarity inflicted; and here, in this very room, her head leaning on my breast, her soul ascended to God who gave it—yet you, her murderer, having with willful malice ensnared her to her living death and left her here to perish, you, Neale Voland, now that she is no more, come forsooth to defile this place, sacred to her sufferings, with your hateful presence. Neale Voland, do not dare.”

No thought of this bitter arraignment had lurked in the profligate's mind when he entered this apartment, flushed with wine, to seek his bride, and lead her like

some fallen Cleopatra to grace his banquet. The revulsion was as terrible as if Miriam's shrouded ghost stood before him, calling him to an account. "My God!" he exclaimed, sinking down upon the couch.

With the up-springing bound of the agile young panther, the child Neale sprang forward.

He, too, had expected this man during the short span of his infantile life, looked for him with every alternation of hope, fear, suspense, blind rage, and finally unmixed hate, that can possess the human heart; and thus to see him on that dear couch, and the idolized mother, for whom he would have given his life blood to have brought him to her, now no more.

His eyes flashed, as with one hand uplifted as if about to strike, and the other tossing back his golden curls as if he disdained to wear the childish ringlets, he cried out with a loud voice—

"Bad man, get off that bed on which my beautiful mamma died. Oh, get off!" he screamed, "you press her to death. I see her now. She lies there as on the day she died—so white and still, and you—you have killed her."

The child's execration fell like a blow, and the unhappy man was at the instant sobered and deathly pale. He sprang from the couch with a hunted look, and asked, with a voice quivering, "Did poor Miriam indeed die *here*?"

"Just there," said Paulina, very sorrowfully, "just there—she lay extended on that couch for five years,

watching, waiting, hoping for you—and oh! monster! you never came. There was at last a merciful day, when hope died out, and she knew herself divorced, knew you as you are, not as she had fancied you. Then she left this precious child in my keeping, resigned herself to God's will, and died on the very spot where an instant ago you were."

The wretched man shuddered. At that moment the blinding scales seemed to fall from his eyes, and the darkness lifted, as one might hold their breath for an instant, wherein he saw things as one may see who holds the even balance of justice, wherewith to measure relative values.

How like a huge mockery did the selfish, so-called pleasures of the past five years, the hollow applause of a cynical world, now seem, as compared with his infinite loss! Truly Miriam, then and there, was avenged; for now a great yearning possessed him once again, as in the early days of his faithless love, to hold, as his own, that trusting, loving heart. But no longer could aught be his but the voice of remorse, that goaded him with its solemn cry, "too late, too late!"

He hid his blanched face within his hands, and trembled violently. Then with a strong effort, and casting a frightened glance at that forbidden spot, so sacred to these others, forbidden to him, he gazed upon his beautiful child wistfully, as he said in a mournful tone:

"And this dear boy is my child."

“No, no,” impetuously exclaimed his son; “I am my mamma’s child, not yours at all. I am *all* hers”—and he stepped back with a cold, proud look, in which Neale saw himself mirrored.

Oh, how he yearned to embrace him; for the long stifled voice of nature, covered over as it had been, and choked out by a fungus growth of worldliness, now would rise up and assert itself.

“This is, indeed, most terrible,” groaned the man, immovable, and still gazing on those lineaments in which he saw the perfect blending of Miriam with himself.

“And will you never go?” called out the little autocrat, with an imperious gesture of dismissal.

“If you wanted to come at all, why did you stay away until she died? My precious mamma loved you once, and wanted you, and cried for you to come, and, bad man, you would not come. Now she is dead, and my dear, new mamma says she does not need you or ever want you any more. No one loves you now. My pretty new mamma hates you, and I—oh! I—hate—hate—hate you.”

The chalice of his bitterness was full and running over. Neale Volland heard no more, but rushing from that place of malediction as one accursed, he almost upset his friend Caleb Sly as he passed, who stood at the door.

Was he ever again to meet one whom he claimed as bride? Or the wronged child who so spurned him with

merciless disdain? Even as he had been pitiless in his infamous conduct to the boy's broken-hearted mother.

As Neale Voland fled from a spot whose very walls cried aloud against him, Sly entered at the still open door, and with smirking grimace and cringing bow stood before Paulina.

The overwrought feelings of the child during his bitter denunciation of a father who had been so unjust, had, by a reaction usual in childhood, found a speedy relief in tears, and he now buried his face in the folds of Paulina's dress, and wept. How beautiful she was! how stately in her immobility! Her deep and brilliant eyes were still riveted where Neale Voland had disappeared, and the slightest tinge of color lent a transparent delicacy to the usual palor of her countenance. Until the man spoke she scarcely noted his presence, for had she not just dismissed with contempt, one to whom, a few short weeks ago, she had given her affection and plighted the fealty of a life. Nor had she, without a sore struggle of conflicting emotions, torn out from her heart and trampled upon an image once so dear to her. But she had now to collect the utmost forces of her will to meet this new danger, for Caleb Sly was a more formidable man to encounter as an enemy, than was Neale Voland. Cool, subtle, wary, sensual, intriguing and remorseless, who could hope to escape from the jeopardy of snares laid by him?

He had determined either to win Paulina, or, failing to do so, to relegate her to a worse than living grave.

Voland was an accomplished, selfish voluptuary, who sinned against others because he thought solely of himself. He would naturally have chosen a life of luxury, for the pursuit of pleasure was the law that regulated his actions.

We have seen that he was, to a certain degree, capable of repentance, and not quite insensible to the pain he inflicted, although he never had the moral strength to overcome his sensuous tastes. His vices are repeated among worldlings until the story has been thrice told. But Caleb Sly was low-born, low-bred and low-minded, while the evil ends he had in view were an outcropping of his own perverted nature.

He was innately cruel, for it gave him positive pleasure to behold the sufferings of others. He felt that he owed the world a grudge, because he was born so obscure, poor and ungainly, so that from the start he had fought a hard fight with circumstances.

Paulina was a person who possessed the traits, natural and acquired, which he had not, and he longed to appropriate to himself so much grace and beauty. He would, in so doing, gain the needed social position; nor did he intend to fail. He proposed to succeed, and he was not a man to let any weakness, any silly sentimentality foil his plan.

The obsequious bow with which he greeted Paulina scarcely concealed the elation he experienced at the thought that he really held her in his power, nor was

he in a mood to brook opposition, or to trouble himself by the use of honied phrases.

He began at once to be piqued that he was, as it were, unnoticed, and when he spoke it was with a rude irony that at once aroused the high spirit of this proud woman.

“Can it be,” said he, “that one so wronged and beautiful, should place her wayward thoughts on the unworthy lover who has just left her, and give no heed to the devotion of a true heart, such as mine?”

It was best, in his opinion, to tear away the mask at once and declare himself openly, for there was little time that stormy night for other wooing than some bandit's bride might hope for.

Did Phidias ever dream of eikor more statuesque, than this frigid image of an insulted woman, as, with a freezing disdain, she glanced at the sordid creature before her? Her lips parted as if to speak, then closed without a word of reply, but the cold look of contempt, the haughty poise of her noble head gave expression to her thoughts.

When Sly uttered those insolent words, Nora rose from her knees and approached her mistress as if to defend her, while the dear child, divining with ready intuition that some harm threatened her whom he loved, clasped her hand with an air of protection and frowned upon Sly.

“No need of scenes,” said the wretch, throwing off all disguise, “and no time for fine phrases either, for I

am here to tell you, madam, that the fool whom you married, and have but a moment since frightened away with some bugaboo about his dead Miriam, has come here for a settled purpose. To-morrow morning he will take you back with him as his bride. This, fair lady, is his bridal tour."

"I will never live with him," said Paulina. "I would die first."

"I thought as much," answered the man, slightly bowing; "in fact, I expected as much from your good taste and nice sense of propriety, after assisting at the death-bed of Miriam. I am told that this unfortunate woman died in your arms."

"Naughty man!" said the child.

"Silence! you little viper," he hissed. "I am not a fool to be bearded by a child, as is your father."

"You have, happily," continued he, addressing Paulina, "a pleasing alternative, for you can elect to marry me so soon as I get your divorce, and that is an easy matter to arrange."

"I would," said Paulina, with slow percision, "sooner die ten thousand deaths than be wedded to you."

"You are not complimentary, madam," snarled Sly, "but such want of good taste shows, as we have feared, an impaired mind. Perhaps it is kindest to let you know that I am here with your husband, as is also another person, in the role of a physician, in order to meet all

legal requirements, and place you as an incurable lunatic in an insane asylum."

"Misther," screamed Nora, falling on her knees before him, with hands uplifted to Heaven, "lave me darlint wid the b'y, an' it's meself as is looney, not her at all, at all. Indade an' indade," she added, imploringly, "it's the dacent madman Nora wud make, an' a nate job of it too, plaze ye, misther."

Sly laughed derisively.

"You shall go too, old Bedlam," said he, "and madam shall be shut up with you, but as for this pert child, the court has made me his guardian, and Mrs. Brown can keep him here."

"A deevil, an' a son of a deevil;" cried Nora, "ye wull burn fur it!"

Sly raised his arm in a livid rage to fell the poor, distracted creature to the floor, but Paulina, with quick movement, turned aside the blow.

Again Sly laughed outright.

"Poor Nora," said Paulina tenderly, stooping to help her to rise; "it is sheer folly thus to rouse the tiger in his den." But she said no word to Sly.

And now Sly's mood changed, and he spoke pleadingly.

"Reflect, dearest creature," he said, "I was born for distinction, we both have wealth, the world is bright and we would have a brilliant career, with troops of friends, and in the enjoyment of every luxury. All this if you but consent to marry me; but if you will obstin-

ately refuse my solicitations; again reflect — have you thought of your awful doom? Imprisoned for life, shut out from all hope, environed by madmen, whose cries of despair, whose ringing fiendish laughter fills the air by day and night; around you will be drivelling idiots and brutal attendants, who will bend your will to their tyranny, and after a time, your strength will give way, your intellect totter to its decline, until finally the light of reason will be extinguished in this outer darkness. How many years do you suppose you can endure such horrors and not become in reality a raving maniac.”

Paulina shivered, but she answered with firmness, “Do you seek, base wretch, to kill me in advance? or do you hope by repeating these awful threats, to bend me to your wicked will? But you forget, that one god-like boon remains to me, which neither you, nor yours, nor all the demons of hell can deprive me of, so long as I remain true to the right. And this boon is so priceless, that all the treasures of worlds heaped on worlds cannot purchase it for such as you. It is the peace, the joy of a pure unshattered conscience.”

“You and the old hag are a pair of miserable idiots, and you may rot together in a mad-house for all I care,” exclaimed Sly in an uncontrollable rage, as he stalked out of the room, slamming the door after him and stamping along the hall, then ascending the stairs, on his way back to the miser’s room. “Foiled in all but my vengeance,” he hissed, “but that shall be ample.”

“Glory be to all the saints,” cried Nora, “the deevil’s skitted.”

“He will return dearest Nora,” said Paulina, trembling, “after the night’s orgy is over—and then—”

Whereupon all three cried bitterly, the child in a passion of sobs, with his arms round Paulina’s neck.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEVIL'S OWN.

THE three men were once more grouped around the old deal table. Hermann had hastily re-entered just in advance of Voland, and playing his part as valet, put aside in the deep recesses of the high windows the remnants of the feast, remarking, "We shall need a breakfast here." He then removed the cloth, and replacing the bottles and glasses on the table, resumed his seat.

As Neale Voland stumbled in, he sank mechanically into his chair, and leaning forward with bowed head on his folded arms, shed burning tears, not of repentance from out the fountains of a contrite heart, revivifying as are the cool waters of the desert, and washing away the many stains that disfigure the weary pilgrim, but tears of remorse, which, like the mirage of refreshing waters amid sandy wastes, gives but a mocking semblance of relief, leaving the spirit more parched and desolate than before. His evident distress delighted the cynical valet, who hated a master from whom he had endured many insults, and also because he was vexed to have been under him in a subordinate position. After a time, Sly returned with a surly, sullen air, and Voland upon

his entrance, raised his head and assumed his usual nonchalant, somewhat haughty manner.

“Come, Sly, be seated,” he said. “This is a hideous night, and we must drive away the blues and make merry. I venture to say that the hazard of cards, and punch — punch brewed steaming hot — will, with some good cigars, soon bring us around all right.”

So saying he went to the fire, which was now a mass of glowing coals, and stooping over, soon brought back the steaming boiling liquid.

The pungent aroma filled the room, and under the effects of the titillating computation, as they tiddled together, puffing away at fragrant Havanas, a bland and soothing influence stole over them.

“*Quantam suff*, doctor,” said Voland, nodding to the valet, as he held his cigar delicately between his fingers, for it seemed to divert him immensely to designate his quondam servant by that title, which he flung at him on all occasions in a sarcastic way that he knew must exasperate the fellow.

“I am not of your opinion,” replied Hermann, dryly; “where are the cards?”

“Who cares to play dummy?” snarled Sly. “We ought to have brought your junior along for a fourth,” remarked Neale Voland, “for where else could one find a fellow fit to hold our hands, outside of the honorable firm of Sly and Pry?”

“Sneer as you will,” jeered Sly, “we never stop at

obstacles. Were the devil himself to take a hand with us we would manage to rope him in."

"Ha! ha!" sneered Hermann, "that's the sort of talk I like. Here's a health to his Infernal Majesty. Oh, Satan, most diabolic, come forth and shuffle this deal"——

The goblets were filled to the brim, duly rattled against each other, and as the bumper was tossed off, each man cried out as if seized with some sudden frenzy:

"Come, Satan, come forth, and shuffle the deal!"

Then a hollow, muffled voice, yet of distinct articulation, responded, "I come!"

Each man started to his feet, amazed, but at the instant, as they regarded each other, from a remote corner of the room, perchance from out some sliding panel, yet so noiselessly that no one noticed from whence he came, there issued forth a dapper little man of smart appearance. He had white hair, heavy, cut close grayish beard, shaggy eyebrows and a somewhat stooping form. He wore a black patch on one cheek as if to hide some ugly scar, and his keen eyes twinkled restlessly over a very red and swollen nose. He seemed to be a hilarious gentleman, very affable and courteous. As he approached the table, bowing to each in turn, holding a *chapeau-bras* under his arm, the startled men covered their confusion by a chorus of scoffing laughter, affecting to be vastly amused, and resuming their seats.

"Pray be seated, sir, and make a fourth," said

Voland, assuming his *rôle* of host. "If you are indeed his Satanic Majesty, we are glad to see you and most happy to find the devil of the nineteenth century such a charming old gentleman."

"We are pleased, Sir Satan," said Sly, "to make your personal acquaintance. Verily, you come at an opportune time —"

"And I," said Hermann, "have had the honor to know you well by reputation these many years; indeed, if I mistake not, we have had some dealings with each other, and I am especially gratified to see you materialize."

The queer little old man laughed outright, laughed derisively both loud and long, but there was a metallic ring in his voice, and when at last he ceased, answering echoes filled the manse, and the fierce blast without took up the refrain, rattled the windows, shook the doors, and filled every cranny with jeering cries — and the three comrades, merry men all, shivered with an involuntary chilliness in spite of their exceeding festivity, as their fourth seized the cards unbidden, and shuffled them well. He did this with the quick and practiced skill of an adept.

"We shall play rouge et noir, gentlemen," said he, and if there is no objection, I will be banker. I like the game well. It is full of opportunities, and where a man has a suitable stake, it is really interesting."

"Agreed," said Voland, "what shall the limit be — how much?"

“Money,” answered the fourth, “is all well enough for the vulgar uses of the world. It has time and again been a good friend to me, and served me well, but to-night, gentlemen, with such choice company, we fly higher game.”

Sly gave him a piercing glance, full of malevolent defiance.

“Let us play to-night,” said he, “for what I crave, as of most worth — mastery.” The stranger answered carelessly: “I am content, if the prize be defined.”

“I define it,” exclaimed Hermann. “Let us stake our lives. A man can do no more than that.”

“Too indefinite by half,” objected the new-comer. “Shall it be body or soul?”

“Both,” shouted the three men simultaneously, as if driven by some mysterious force they could not resist.

“Very good,” smilingly assented the stranger, “with one express stipulation; he who wins has absolute control.”

“We consent,” re-affirmed the three.

“Please make your choice then,” said the stranger.

Thereupon they all, as if by one impulse, staked their bodies and their souls on noir.

The banker then took the cards, shuffled them well, and the play began. Passing them to Voland to cut — he having returned them — the deal commenced. So engrossed were they, that no sound broke the stillness, save the rapid breathing of the three men as the banker slowly and carefully dealt each card. Ere he turned

the last, he paused, then in a ringing voice he cried, "Rouge wins, noir loses," and wild and fiendish laughter now echoed and re-echoed through every nook and crevice of the old manse. The maddened men with closed fists struck the table heavily, and the crash of broken glass sounded like the chattering of dead men's teeth. The tempest rose to a more dreadful fury, the dislodged bricks came rattling down the wide open-mouthed chimneys, the broken stone wall was laid low, the swing beam over the old well was snapped asunder, dropping its oaken bucket into the depths beneath, whereat the angry waters splashed and gurgled, and the giant Norway spruce that so long had stood sentinel at the very door was hurled from its strong supports and uprooted, and the huge toppling rocks not far distant were rent from their base, and fell crashing down the pinnacled crags.

But amid the wild din and uproar of the elements, and as if a part of the conflict, arose to confront high heaven, the blasphemous execrations of these wicked men.

"We shall meet again, gentlemen," said the weird little old man solemnly, and in mandatory tones, addressing each in turn.

"In twenty-four hours, Caleb Sly, I shall expect you. Do not fail me."

"And you, sir," pointing a bony finger at Hermann, "will be called for in ten days."

"But as to you, Squire Voland, ere another month

is ended you will behold your wronged Miriam as one afar off, but she will know you not."

At these successive summons, the men became dead-ly pale, their knees knocked together, and they turned bewildered glances one upon the other, while the strange and awful visitor quickly disappeared; only Sly, who first recovered himself, thought he saw a moving panel in a far corner of the room, glide into place, nor did he fail to mark the spot.

Succeeding the shock of the storm swirl, an appalling silence fell over the scene.

For the dread summons given to each man in his turn, had dismayed them, for reasons best known to themselves.

But life-long habits of incredulous thought soon re-asserted their sway over the highly wrought, almost phrenetic state, into which they had been temporarily plunged.

Neale Voland speedily laughed at the adventure, as an hallucination produced by the strength of the liquor he had concocted. "After to-night," he remarked, "we will not again brew our punch so strong, for, by heaven, I fancy we have all of us had a touch of *delirium tremens*."

"I am not quite sure," said Sly, "but I have a notion that we have all made egregious asses of ourselves. It occurs to me that I have seen before, the restless, twinkling eyes of that wretch, and if I can but verify my suspicions, it were better for that man had he never been

born, than for him to be able to boast having fooled Caleb Sly."

"And as for me," said Hermann, vindictively, "a man might as safely play with lightning as to deceive me; I am a two-edged sword, that can cut both ways."

Both his associates looked at the fellow in amazement.

"Now confess, doctor," said Sly, "that you have a history, and one mixed up with certain diabolic ventures."

"Egad! I dare say," interlocuted Voland.

"You flatter me, gentlemen," disclaimed the fellow, "I have never, 'pon honor, been engaged in any undertaking more to my taste than the present enterprise."

"Egad!" again ejaculated Voland, shrugging his shoulders. "We ought to make hay while the sun shines, doctor, for if our devil is a true prophet, we have all of us but short shift to make"—and he trembled as if some painful image passed before him.

Hermann's face became strangely distorted as he answered with an oath, "Let them do their worst, I had as soon die as live, any day."

Again both of his confederates regarded him attentively.

"Who are you, anyhow?" blurted out Sly, putting on a rough manner; you might as well make a clean breast of it. Our ventures are embarked in one bottom."

The more gentlemanly Voland winced, which, Her-

mann noticing, he replied with a sort of swaggering contempt:

“Don't be too sure of that, Caleb Sly. I can hold the key of more mysteries on my little finger than you two have ever dreamed of.”

“My studies have for years brought me face to face with the occult sciences. I have visited Egypt, the cradle of Hermetic philosophy, and made myself master of her secret lore; I have investigated the unexplored subtleties of the Arabian school and listened to their sages expatiate on the wonders of their talismans, and the hidden virtues of the philosopher's stone.

“My affiliations with the net-work of secret societies, whose ramifications like the octopus seize everything and are spread everywhere, will give me an immense power when the time comes for action, and that predestined time is close at hand. Then shall all men, as in the early days, speak one tongue and be bound to work towards one end. For is not unity the grand climax?”

“And after we shall have changed and subverted all law — social, moral, political — we will grasp a hitherto unknown mastery over those so-called natural laws that at present hold things in tame and narrow grooves. We shall then aspire to hurl into an abyss of confusion, a universe so illy adjusted by its blundering Creator and out of the commingled elements build up anew.

“Already I have pierced the darkness, and have gained the power to destroy mankind in a thousand

ways when I choose to do so. Not vulgar methods, but such as science delights to handle. For instance, you yield a shadow. Did it ever occur to you that within that shadow lurks your double, and upon that fleeting shade I can so enfix my spells, that you will pine away and die, not knowing wherein you are hurt? Yet this is but a slight affair, for I have in an awful, never-to-be-forgotten hour, confronted the glory of that Shechinah that dwells in fire, whose lambent purity can only be made visible to initiated eyes. I am familiar with the schemes of the astrologer and can make out for you an exact horoscope of the future.

“I can condense the moon’s rays by a process of alchemy, and throwing the magic charm over those who lie in deep slumber, make them raving maniacs; or through the sun’s rays, by the action of solar heat, penetrate into that hidden sympathy between metallic substances and the heavenly bodies. Heat and motion are the primal laws.

“But above all and beyond all,” and here his expression became simply diabolic, “I can, by my skill and knowledge, prepare subtle chemical compounds of a force hitherto unknown or even imagined. Out of these explosive forces we can throw a world in ruins. Then there are poisons known only through such crucial experiments as I have made, unknown among the ordinary pharmaceutical preparations, but obtained by conducting processes of distillation of such destructive rapidity that if they but come in contact with the

human body under certain conditions, dissolution is immediate.

“Think, for instance, of the concentrated virus of the deadly fang of the coluber, or the opoblepa, or the fixed magnetism of the eye of the basilisk! Out of the arcanum of nature we have seized deadly weapons. Nor has science alone taught us to destroy, but likewise how to preserve human life.

“I have discovered an elixir, that is no nostrum, that will at no distant day give me fabulous wealth.

“It is a wine so exhilarating that he who partakes of it will have new life infused. The ingredients counteract decay. Why should we grow old? Why, in fact, should man ever die? Simply because, out of his sheer stupidity, he does not know how to supply waste, how to build up. His joints stiffen, his hair bleaches, his skin wrinkles, because of the accumulations of effete matter, which his ignorance does not enable him to remove from the system. I have found out the causes of waste, which are in great part chemical; and, knowing the cause, can apply the needed remedies. Thus we may, after a few generations of steady progress in the right direction, learn to carry out the primal law of our being and live forever. Learned societies in Europe are now seriously discussing this very problem, but they are all on the wrong track. I alone have gained a knowledge of the counteracting and revivifying forces. As to the arts of the magicians, of conjurations, of the power

to wield odic and physic influences, of mesmeric and magnetic attraction, they are mine."

Hermann paused, having fairly exhausted himself in the delivery of this labored harangue, which he had pronounced in a pompous manner, at times with closed eyes, as if communing with himself.

"Can you call that devil back?" asked Sly.

"Undoubtedly," replied the student, "did he not come when I invoked him? Would you see him again?"

"By no means," replied Voland, hastily. "In view of our compact, and of his absolute ownership of our bodies and souls—it is enough."

"Shall I give you some manifestation of my power?" asked Hermann.

"In what way?" inquired Sly.

"Would you see the face of your dead mother?" suggested Hermann.

"Now, I know you lie," retorted Sly. "She still lives—"

"Rash man," replied Hermann, not heeding the insult, "be not too sure of that. I have beheld her shadow projected into the valley of death, where at this moment I can see her at the boundary line."

Sly involuntarily started, then, recovering himself, said, "You would make a splendid showman, doctor."

"Shall I give you an exhibition of my skill in languages?" asked the student. "I can converse readily, not only in the various languages of Modern Europe, such as French, German, Spanish, Italian, but I can

give you communications from the spirit world, in Norwegian, Persian, Sanscrit, in the dead tongues, and I hold at least seventeen different languages at my command."

"God be praised you are not a woman," laughed Voland.

"You have a very stupid familiar not to have taught you more than that," sneered Sly. "While the demon was about it, he should have instructed such an apt scholar in at least the seventy tongues of Cardinal Mezzofanti."

"Do you really know these languages?" asked Voland.

"I know them fluently," responded Hermann, "as infused by the spirits."

"That means, I suppose," replied Voland, "that the spirits tell you, and you repeat, like a paroquet."

Hermann flushed, but he replied, "Know, Neale Voland, that my familiar can discern the secrets of your life, past, present and future; and I have but to ask him, and he will make them known to me."

"Ha! ha!" jeered Sly. "These tricky spirits make of your mind a sieve, through which they pour their nonsense; it infiltrates through, and leaves only a sediment—spirit dregs—probably."

"Gentlemen," said Hermann, very composedly, "it is easy to sneer. This is the weapon of ignorance from the beginning. But facts cannot lie. Here is an old deal table—a miser's table—ha! ha! and therefore of

rude construction. You know that I did not bring it here. Shall I make it rise to the ceiling, and hang like Mahomet's coffin, suspended there."

"God forbid!" cried Voland. "Keep it right here—we need it, for this night's revelry must go on."

"Let us brew more punch, fill and refill our goblets, quaff the delicious nectar, and be satisfied with the spiritual essence we imbibe."

Voland is quite right," said Sly. "We have had spiritual manifestations enough for one night. I dare say the doctor believes in theosophy, astral shapes and metempsychosis."

"Of course I do," gravely responded that learned person. "I have a distinct recollection of several existences—once I was a warrior, then I was an eagle."

"And have you no recollection," politely interrupted Voland, "of that time when you were such a famous jackass?"

Hermann would have made an angry reply but Sly interfered. "Come, come," he said, "there is work enough ahead in the morning. A bumper to the fair lunatic below."

Voland's face flushed crimson.

"I say, Sly," said he, trembling, "it's too devilish. I think I'll let her off."

"You'll do no such thing, you drivelling idiot," cried Sly, vehemently. "We've gone too far for that nonsense."

"And I," said Hermann, "care not what happens,

having pocketed my thousand dollars. It will be rich to see the capers of that old Irishwoman. She is an original." And then he recounted with inimitable drollery the whole story of the umbrella, and how he had left a new silk one to replace the one stolen; and Sly laughed heartily.

But Voland inquired with indignation, "How did you happen to know all this, doctor?"

The man answered without a blush—

"Readily. I listened at the half open door."

It is needless to add that Voland registered, then and there, a mental oath to get rid of the rascal when this sad work was at an end.

And now they drank heavily, and what with the weariness incident to all the fatigue of travel and the excitements of the night, added to the late hour of three in the morning, they grew very drowsy as they sat round that ancient board.

"Suppose," said Hermann, with a drawling utterance, "we put our will-power into this rickety thing, and make it uphold us while we sleep." So they each stretched forth a hand lazily to the other, which was no sooner done than a deep sleep overtook them, and they fell heavily forward on to the rough surface of the plank.

The sin-freighted board, charged with the magnetism thus infused into it, groaned and quivered under their weight, and mixed itself up like a malignant thing, with many hideous spectral shapes of their nightmare dream.

Voland beheld it as a monstrous bat with wide spreading wings, upon which he sailed, cleaving the air, until at last he was aware of a shadowy image of Miriam, robed in white apparel, impassible, glorious, but ever looking upward, taking no heed of him. He cried aloud, he implored, entreated, filled the air with protestations of fondest love, but she heeded him not, but ever with upturned gaze was absorbed by some rapturous vision he could not see — when, oh despair, he felt himself to be sinking, borne upon the downward motion of the bat's huge wings — with one last effort he cried to her — “wife, wife,” — at that sacred name, registered by their vows in heaven, whither she was borne, she paused and glancing downward sorrowfully, sighed — “that which God had joined, man did put asunder.” He knew his doom, for ever after he was falling, falling.

Nor did the old deal table fail to torment Sly. It burned into his parched soul, taking on the shape of one big, glaring, cyclopean eye, an all-seeing eye, that searched every hidden corner of his pestiferous soul, bringing forth into its consuming light the concealed malice, the damnable purposes, the inexorable cruelties, the blasphemous desecrations of which he had been guilty; ever burning, with fierce and fiercer heat, until through the marrow of his bones, through every muscle, fibre and nerve, he was one shriveled mass of sheeted, all consuming, but never consumed fire — all aflame but yet all alive.

And beside him, as he writhed, there sprang into tormenting power over Hermann, the mesmeric influence he had evoked.

It crept upon him, as an insatiable vampire asking sustenance; his life's blood only whetted its appetite for more. How deathly cold, and faint, and chill, how freezing, how icy, how congealed, stiff frozen, it was; but oh, the stinging, burning of that piercing cold, ice piled upon thick ribbed ice, and yet always to freeze and never to die.

As thus they slumbered, they moaned and groaned, they cursed and wrestled with invisible foes, but could never lift the dark mantle of overpowering sleep until the sun had climbed high in the heavens that wintry morning.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPE.

CALEB SLY left Paulina, Nora, and the child in tears; and as he strode swiftly onward to rejoin his associates, and assist in the night's orgies, he passed by still another one whom he had made inexpressibly wretched, and that other one was the abject and miserable Mrs. Brown, for whom no created thing felt one ray of real sympathy.

Nora, to be sure, was at first sorry for her, but the obstinate silence of the woman repelled all advances, and Nora's commiseration had subsided into mere curiosity.

Paulina had been borne too swiftly in the surging torrent of events to pause to notice her with any interest, and the child had, with that unreasoning impetuosity common to children, contracted the most violent antipathy toward her.

There was but one being in the wide, wide world to whom she turned with a wistful, hungry craving, and she ever yearned for some slight mark of affection from him. One loving word on his part would have lifted her desolate soul from the darkness in which it was plunged, into as much sunlight as her blighted life

could have required. But that one affectionate look or word never was bestowed on her. Caleb Sly, the mean scoundrel, never deigned to grant that recognition, and when he paused for an instant as he passed her, it was with a movement as if he were about to crush a writhing worm.

After he had gone, the three prisoners wept within the dismal room during the dreary watches of that dreadful night; but she, the forlorn one, who kept guard, crouched outside the door, had no tears to shed, for a blank despair closed around her benumbed senses. Nor was there bird or flower, mouse, spider, cat or dog that gave her welcome, no growing, no living thing had need of *her*.

Who that has passed amid the hurrying crowds of cities, but has met her prototype? Old, blear-eyed, wrinkled, thinly clad, stumbling, feeble, sordid and utterly repulsive. Like some foul scavenger-bird, eking out a palsied existence upon filthy garbage. Who pauses, who cares to know what agonizing throbs may rend that heart, placed in a casket of so little worth? Ah, who among us is innocent, who is guiltless of want of pity toward these children of our common Father? Who stops of all the passing throng to help to lift the heavy burthen, if but by one glance of mercy, or one gentle word spoken in kindly tones?

When that awful shock of the tempest seemed to shake the house to its very foundations, she alone uttered no cry of terror. All was alike to her, "come weal

come woe," for hope had died within her breast; that bosom that had nursed into life a viper, whose deadly fangs now paralyzed her being.

There she sat upon the floor, just where Hermann's heavy tread had extorted from even her, a cry of pain. He had stepped upon an outstretched, listless hand, and it was now black and swollen from the hurt. Yet she had given no further heed to it, although bewildered with the throbbing pain, as she leaned forward, swaying herself to and fro, half dazed.

The hours passed on, and it was now nearly three in the morning, just as the revelers above sank into a profound slumber, when the figure of the same little old man, who had made so mysterious an ingress and egress in the miser's chamber, quickly bent over her.

She experienced a sickening faintness, and when she would have cried out and given an alarm, she felt too confused to do so. Then she seemed to be falling from a great height, as if off a precipice, and then she knew nothing more.

A minute later the key turned, the door was slowly poned, and the quaint figure appeared before the astonished group within.

Nora's half uttered cry was at once repressed, as he said to them hurriedly:

"I am your friend. Make not the slightest outcry or we are lost. I have risked my life, Paulina, to save yours. The old woman at the door is chloroformed, but presently she will revive. The wretches above have

just fallen into the first deep sleep of heavy drink. But the wicked Sly is ever on his guard, and I fancy he sleeps with one eye open. Get your warmest wraps, for it is a terrible night. Now come quickly, or we are forever lost."

Paulina seemed to have grown old during the horrors of the past hours. She had, in the long watches of that night, measured in imagination the awful fate that appeared inevitable. How she had ever survived it all, the terror, the danger, the apparent hopelessness of her situation, God alone knows.

At first, after Sly had announced her terrible doom and left them, she fell to the floor as one in a dead swoon; the masses of her unclasped hair had fallen around her, and her fixed and rigid expression gave her in reality the look of one demented and crazed with sorrow.

For a long time Nora had knelt beside her, ever praying, praying, and the boy had sobbed himself to sleep. But after a time Paulina gained strength to rise. She carried the sleeping child tenderly in her arms, and laid him on Miriam's couch, and there, with the strange obliviousness of childhood, he rested peacefully. Perchance Miriam's spirit soothed him, for he smiled as one in pleasant dreams.

Paulina was still watching him when the stranger entered, and Nora sat now, with still and folded hands clasping her beads.

The child was quietly aroused, and wrapped in shawls; Paulina got her fur cloak and Nora her warmest mantle.

It was all the work of a moment, and they accompanied their guide in silence.

At three in the morning of early December it is perfectly dark, but the violence of the tempest had abated and given way to fitful gusts of intensely bleak wind. As they softly opened the front door, carefully closing it, and stood out in the open air, it seemed for a moment difficult to breathe, so piercing was the cold.

“We must make all haste and exert ourselves or we shall freeze,” whispered their friend. “I have a buggy in waiting, and the feet of my horse are covered with felt — all is ready.” But at this moment, as if a new and unexpected thought occurred to him, he said: “I am sorry, but I cannot take the nurse; the carriage is too small. The child we can arrange for, but there is absolutely no room for the old woman.”

“Then,” said Paulina decidedly, “we will go back. I will not leave Nora.”

“Alanna, pet,” said Nora, crying, “an’ shure, ye wud not be so looney — lave ye Nora an’ flee.”

But already Paulina had turned to re-enter the house, when the man caught her by the arm.

“This is sheer folly,” said he. “Hasten on. I have thought of a new plan. We will take the team brought by Voland and leave ours. There’s more risk in it, but if they sleep soundly it can be done.” So saying, he busied himself in making the change as quickly as possible.

The horses were harnessed into the larger convey-

ance. Nora held the bulls-eye lantern that the man had taken from Mrs. Brown, and after a time all was in readiness to start. Yet, hasten as they would, nearly half an hour had elapsed before the little party were all snugly placed and fairly off.

Already, a faint glimmer of light streaked the eastern horizon, heralding the near-coming day. Yet, in the obscurity that still prevailed, they had to proceed with the greatest caution at first. The uprooted tree, and all the devastation wrought by the recent storm, whose force was scarcely spent, had to be avoided.

But at last they were fairly in the open road, and their driver knew how to handle the reins, so on they sped.

Nora's exultation could not be quite repressed, for at the last turn of the road, as the old manse disappeared from view, she cried out:

“The Lord be praised an' all His saints, an' may thim deevils we lave, burn for it.”

Not another word was spoken, and the horses were soon picking their way carefully down the icy, slippery mountain road, being wisely left to choose the path for themselves. But once safely in “Sleepy Valley” below, they made excellent time, for just as they reached the railroad station, the ten o'clock morning mail train came in.

Throwing the reins hurriedly to a railroad employé standing near, the queer little old man, as he hustled his party on the cars, cried out, as the train was moving

onward, "The team belongs to Neale Volland," and they were off.

Yet having once placed them on the cars, and saved them from the snares laid for them, he disappeared from view; nor did they see him again.

However, Paulina knew the route, and as the evening of that day closed in, a hired hack, containing the three, entered the familiar avenue at Hazlehurst, and they were once more at home.

But as the door opened, and Paulina once again stepped over the threshold of that secure haven, storm-tossed and almost shipwrecked as she had been, the reaction after the severe tension proved too great, and she fell forward in a swoon as one dead. Now all was confusion, and a doctor was sent for in greatest haste. We leave her in the kind and skillful hands of one who quickly responded to the summons, and return to the scenes still in progress at the old manse. * * *

Half an hour after Mrs. Brown had been chloroformed she began to recover her senses. But it was some little time after she became conscious as to her surroundings, before her power of volition returned.

It required even then, the strong will power which she had, to overcome the nausea and the sense of sluggishness that remained, so far as to rouse herself.

But with the return of clearer thought, came the certainty that some plot had been carried out involving the escape of Paulina.

She at once realized that Sly would be furious if such

plan had succeeded, and that he would never cease to blame her as the sole cause of the failure of his wishes.

While she did not know the scope of his schemes, yet she suspected that he intended to force Paulina to marry him. Although she had an extreme fear of displeasing him, yet she had a keen eagerness that he might succeed, for she bore him a mixed love and fear, with a longing desire to earn from him some mark of approval.

Stirred to make a great effort by the force of these conflicting emotions, she managed to rouse herself, to rise and look into the room where Paulina had been confined. Not finding her there, she rushed into the open air, just in time to catch a glimpse of the party as they disappeared from view.

At this woful sight such a blank horror overcame her, for she knew that she had sinned past forgiveness in Sly's eyes, that she sank upon the cold ground quite unable to move.

Perhaps an hour later and just as the sun had faintly tipped the mountain top with struggling beams of light, the good-natured farmer who had been the day previous engaged to take Paulina, Nora, and the child, to the station in time for the noon train, arrived in his wagon, which was large enough for the trio and their luggage.

He had ventured out with reluctance, and as the evidences of the recent tempest increased as he neared the place, he muttered to himself:

“This be a storm to make a man e'en a most afeard

to leave hum, and if I hadn't telled her I'd cum anyhow, I'd a backed out."

At every step the wreck on the mountain top and especially around the house, came plainer into view.

"Deu tell!" he cried out, "that thar wall's tumbled and the shackly well beam's clean broke, and the big tree, and — deu tell! what sort of a barn-yard fowl's this?"

So saying, he sprang quickly to the ground as he spied poor Mrs. Brown stretched out half-frozen and insensible.

"Wall, I'll be blamed! if t'aint that humbly Miss Brown! In all my born days, I never see'd the likes of sich a rampageous night. T'aint likely she was blowed out. Pr'aps she was. Halloo, the hus!" He waited a moment, but no one answered.

"Wall, it be a pesky job, and thar's a shay, too, in the old wood hus. But t'aint no time to dilly dally, or the old gal'll die."

Then he looked in the house, and saw the confusion of things in the hall, and peering into the lower rooms, found them vacant. Just as he was about to go upstairs, he heard a sound as of heavy and labored breathing, at which he retreated, much alarmed, and observing the fresh marks of wheels in the slushy yard, he ran back at full speed.

"It's skeersome hereabouts, no how," said he, "but a man can't leave a fellow specie to freeze outright, and if so be as how she's not too hefty, I'll make a bee line

to hum with the woman, now I'm in for it." And with a vigorous pull at the inanimate form of the miserable woman, this kind-hearted countryman lifted her up and placed her comfortably in his wagon, then with a cheery "git" to his team, made off as he remarked, "purty lively."

The loud halloo of the farmer as he hailed the house, and the noise made by his heavy team as he rattled off, were the first noises that somewhat disturbed the deep slumber of Sly; whose quick ear was not entirely closed against sound, even while resting with the hideous incubus of his frightful dream.

But he sank again, almost at once, into a troubled sleep, out of which he finally roused himself with effort. The obscured sun glinted through the high narrow windows, and peered into the room in a sickly way that was very depressing.

Sly was naturally ill-tempered, and he was especially surly as he stretched out his stiffened limbs, benumbed with cold and cramped from the constrained position of the past five or six hours.

The fire had died out on the hearth, and the cold without made itself felt in the chilled room.

"That lazy o'd hag," muttered he, "not a stick of wood on the hearth; may she and the brat freeze here together this winter. But she'll make the gentleman's son work. It'll be good for him, and I'll make her."

The thought pleased his fancy, and as he looked scornfully at the sleeping men, he asked himself:

“Why not seize Paulina, anyhow, make off with her and leave this pair of fools in the lurch? It is easy to invent a thousand lies to hide the truth. Meantime she would be mine, and that would be better vengeance than the plan of the insane asylum.”

He rose, moved noiselessly to the fireplace where some slight warmth lingered in the stone hearth. As he leaned forward, his eye caught the dull glimmer of a steel ring set in the stone.

The entire scene of the night before flashed upon him. The wonderful appearance and disappearance of the supposed devil, and he instantly connected the two.

“I am a thrice sodden fool,” he grumbled, “not to have seen it before. This is the miser’s chamber, and the mean hunks must have daily died a thousand deaths for fear of his treasures being found out. Of course the place is honey-combed, and — great God! there must be somewhere concealed his hidden treasures. Let me recall: The wretch was never heard of, doubtless he was murdered, or he should have been made way with. And this,” as he knelt down to examine the stone, “is certainly a trap door.”

“Ah, ha! A new revelation strikes me.

“I have it all. That devil was Pry, who knows the house well, better than I do. I thought I knew the keen twinkle of those restless eyes, notwithstanding his clever disguise. I never saw another pair just so piercing.”

Sly’s face grew purple with rage at the recollection of how completely he had been tricked.

“It was a bold game to play,” he groaned, “and if I had him here now I’d choke him—thus,” and his fingers closed so tightly on the steel ring as to leave an empurpled circlet. There was a perceptible movement of the flat stone.

“By heavens, that is a trap-door! I must return alone and examine it carefully. Now for the moving panel where Pry stepped out. I marked the place, and, besotted as I was, I ought to know it again.”

He rose and felt his way carefully along the wainscoting, moving his hands up and down, then sideways along the boards, until at last one panel yielded.

“Enough,” he said, “this is not the fitting time; I’ll return; and now let me be the first to salute the fair lunatic this frosty morning. Women are changeable, and she may find me more to her taste than a mad-house, after a night’s reflection.”

So mumbling to himself, he slid along with muffled step, for now Voland moved uneasily, as if about to wake. The first thing that arrested his attention was the stream of cold air that entered as he opened the door of the room.

“Miserable old dolt! Gone out for wood, and left the door open such a day as this! She’s outlived her usefulness,” he added spitefully, and now walking rapidly along to Paulina’s door, which reaching, he boldly opened without stopping to knock, with the assured insolence of a master.

He commenced to say, “Bad manners, I know, not

to knock—" when at one swift glance he realized the situation. The dreadful fact of their escape confronted him. He ran to the front door, which had been left ajar (he now understood why), and there were the marks in the frozen but wet ground, made by the wheels of several vehicles.

He ran swiftly up-stairs, rudely shook Voland and then Hermann, exclaiming:

"Confound you, wake up! Hell and fury, rouse yourselves! Our game's bagged."

Thereupon Hermann started up with an angry glare, and Voland, rubbing his swollen eyes, complained of headache.

"Zounds!" roared Sly. "No time for nonsense now. Be up and doing."

They all three rushed to the outhouse, only to find their horses and carriage gone, and in its place a horse and buggy. Then they raved and cursed, maddened with the defeat of their conspiracy.

But presently Sly said:

"We only exhaust ourselves in vain, lose our time, and accomplish nothing; and meanwhile we shall all perish with cold."

"Neale Voland, take this buggy. The woman is your wife. You have the first and best right to chase the fugitives from justice. She has eloped with Pry."

"It is not possible!" exclaimed Voland.

"I know it to be so," re-affirmed Sly. "She has eloped with my junior partner, Pry. I'll give my rea-

sons another time. But now, hasten on, and have them arrested. Declare her to be insane, and swear out a warrant against Pry. But don't forget us, and when you reach the station, send a conveyance of some kind back for us; and see to it that you do not keep us too long in this confounded den."

"You are generous, Sly," said Voland, quite surprised at his apparent unselfishness. "We are freezing here, and I shall be off like a flash."

Meantime Hermann had the horse harnessed and Voland started quickly, just about the time that Paulina had reached the station.

Nor was Voland as unhappy as might be supposed, at the idea of her escape. But he was angry to be outwitted, dreaded exposure, and he was enraged at the possibility of Paulina's having gone with Pry. Yet he had no confidence in Sly, and did not see how such an adventure was possible, and so came to the conclusion that there was some new scheme on foot—nor did he quite understand Sly's eagerness to have Paulina confined in an insane asylum; as to the project that had at first engaged his attention, he had quite determined to forego any revenge that involved so much savagery. He found that the reflections resulting from such a course made him too uncomfortable, and his conscience was already too much agitated, to willingly add a new source of uneasiness.

He did not arrive at the station in time for the noon train, but he found his own team there, and left for him

sure enough, in a way that seemed to confirm Sly's statement about Pry.

It was now so late in the day that no one would undertake to go and return with the carriage, and the best that could be done, was to engage a man to drive to the manse for his confederates the next morning. Meantime he left in a night train for home.

Voland was rather diverted at the idea that his late comrades would have a dismal time of it waiting, for in his heart he despised them both, and congratulated himself that he had parted company from them.

One thing he did not intend to do, and that was, have Paulina and Pry arrested, and thus bring the whole transaction before the public, and have his private grievances ventilated in open court, and his contemplated rascality exposed.

"It is high time," said Neale Voland, as he arrived home the next morning, "that I should shake off such low curs and resume that place in social circles that by right belongs to me, and I am not sorry that Paulina has taken the child from that infernal Sly. But she shall not keep him, unless she comes back to me, and there'll be a long lawsuit yet, as to whose is the child, as sure as his name, and mine, is Neale Voland."

This selfish worldling had sinned, as we have before pointed out, because he was a huge egotist, and never considered others. His cruelties were in consequence rather passive than active, but he drew back with an

innate repulsion at the spring of the tiger in Sly's nature.

He had never paused in his unworthy career, to measure the extent of the suffering inflicted on Miriam, for she was forgotten by him rather than intentionally tortured. Such brief passion of love as he once had felt for her was extinguished by other pleasures, and he was only recalled to a sense of his iniquitous conduct when Miriam's death was announced to him by Sly. Then he felt conscience stricken. This impression was heightened and confirmed by his visit to the scene of her prolonged trials, and the reproaches of Paulina which he knew to be merited.

And when he saw his own beautiful child, whom he had so shamefully neglected, and who, witnessing a beloved mother's misery and death brought on by his misconduct, learned to hate him — then it was, that all too late he yearned to retrieve the past, and regain his boy.

But "the wages of sin is death," and he was about to reap as he had sowed. His divorced wife, who loved him, was blotted out, and he was the object of their son's maledictions.

CHAPTER XII.

RETRIBUTION.

THERE is always, at some time, a culmination in the affairs of men, a harvest to be reaped either of good or evil.

In some cases, this result is so peculiarly striking that people are forced to exclaim, "This is a case of poetic justice." The simple truth is, that God's justice always goes even handed with His mercy, only at times the balance is struck in another world and beyond mortal ken, while again, we catch glimpses of retributive justice in this.

When such effects occur, leading up to some dramatic *denouement*, we can, later on, trace incidents which, in themselves trifling, were really parts of one harmonious whole, and of necessity belonged to the action in progress.

We have now arrived at such a point in our story where we can see the connecting link, toward the attainment of the end.

We shall presently perceive that during the rapid march of events terminating in a catastrophe, the seemingly trivial taking away of the larger conveyance for the escape of Paulina, so as to necessitate Neale Voland

leaving his confederates, as also the removal of Mrs. Brown, were needed in order to place Sly and Hermann in sole possession of the manse.

When Voland drove off, the two men went back into the house and made a fire in the room recently occupied by Paulina, for they were very cold. In the beginning, Sly, like one who unexpectedly learns some secret, did not wish to share it with any one, and he was apprehensive that Hermann might also discover some mystery about the miser's chamber. So he, himself, brought down the remnants of last night's feast, and they breakfasted together, cozily enough, by the fire in Miriam's room below.

At first Sly thought that he would not communicate his discovery to any one, but as the day wore on and the expected carriage did not arrive, he had more time for reflection, and finally, just at dusk, when another night on the mountain seemed inevitable and it was quite certain that they would be undisturbed, he concluded with much hesitation to take Hermann in as a partner. In case any treasure should be found, he trusted to that wily stratagem, which he always knew so well how to weave, to get the lion's share.

Several reasons led him to adopt this course, rather than the one that first suggested itself, which was to return alone as speedily as possible and make a thorough search of the premises. If he waited to do this, there was the advantage of securing any booty he might find, all for himself; yet, again, there was the disadvantage

of not being able to come back to so remote a spot without attracting some notice.

He knew how curious country people were whenever a stranger made his appearance among them, and he was sure that he could not well leave the station and return to it unseen. Then there was Pry. That decided him. He would steal a march on Pry. As to Hermann, he had proved a clever associate and an unscrupulous one, and these were two excellent qualities, in Sly's eyes. Having decided, he lost no time in opening up the subject.

"We were," said he, "three drivelling idiots last night to let Pry play that low trick on us and get off with our prisoners."

"How so?" inquired Hermann. "I was surprised when you told Voland that Pry had eloped with his wife, but I supposed you were only trying to throw the man on the wrong track. The fact is," added he, hesitating, "I was not quite sure but that you had secreted the party yourself, for purposes of your own."

"If I had kept my wits about me, such a ruse could have been played out," answered Sly, rather pleased at the compliment to his assumed cleverness. "Perhaps," added he, with a scrutinizing look, "you, doctor, know something more about it than you choose to confess."

"'Pon honor, no!" laughed Hermann, well pleased in turn, "although it did occur to me once or twice, that there were opportunities to be made use of."

"I rather like you," said Sly, "you are such an im-

puident scoundrel, and I've half a mind to tell you a secret."

"Bury it in Hades," replied the fellow, "and it wouldn't be so safe. I hold the secrets of societies in my hands, that the braggart police and their vaunted detectives would give their right hand to ferret out."

Sly started, half afraid to trust a person who was doubtless a fugitive, and sought for some offense; when it flashed upon him that this would be all the better for his purposes, as he could make use of the fellow and when he had done with him, denounce him as one amenable to law.

So he said very seriously, "Doctor, I have faith in you, and with your help we can make this a night's work worth remembering. Swear to keep as a profound secret what I am about to divulge to you."

"In the name of Satan, I swear," said Hermann with a deep oath, adding, "You know his majesty answered me last night."

"None of that nonsense" sneered Sly. "I can certify that you are a first-class juggler, but you can't deceive Caleb Sly, who knows more about that devil than you do. Come now, already it grows dark and we have only the glimmer of a lantern for our operations to-night."

They ascended to the scene of the recent orgy, when Sly at once proceeded to the moving panel, which slid back upon being pressed, disclosing a steep, narrow stairway.

"Behold!" exclaimed Sly triumphantly, "whence

our devil escaped, and he was none other than my junior partner, Pry. I would recognize him in any disguise, among a million of men. It was on account of those basilisk eyes of his that I chose him as my associate.

They descended the precipitous stairs, which led into an arched way in the cellar, and out from under the house, until they ascended some half dozen steps, lifted a loose stone, which had been carelessly closed, and emerged in the cleft of a rock not far distant.

Hermann laughed ironically, and Sly looked much disappointed.

“This,” said he, “accounts for Pry’s adventure. The miser kept it as a means of escape in case he was attacked.”

“That may be,” replied Hermann, “but what’s that to us? We’ve had a miserable tramp to no purpose.”

“Dolt!” answered Sly, “we’ll try again. If a man constructs a subterranean passage for flight, it is because he has treasures to guard and fears attack. It never was known what became of him, and he was reputed wealthy.”

They returned to the room, and Sly at once went to the old fireplace, where, stooping over, without much effort he displaced a thin stone set in the hearth, holding it up by the small steel ring he had observed. Both men started back at the musty smell, and a sort of pestiferous effluvia that came up from the deep, closed in, dark depth.

Bad air had evidently been confined there for some time, and they prudently waited a little while to ventilate the place, before descending.

“This is a discovery,” chuckled Sly, “that Pry has never made. I’d like to pitch him headforemost down these steep stairs. Go on, doctor,” said he.

“Don’t mistake me for Pry,” mildly hinted that gentleman. “Come, I’ll light you,” and they slowly descended the spiral iron stairs, some twenty steps.

Hermann, who preceded, reached the bottom first, when he gave an irrepressible shout, that re-echoed in sepulchral moans and groans within the hollow, vaulted space, then rising into jibing jeers, as it ascended into the miser’s chamber above, rang out through the old house, and died away in its remotest corners in an indescribable confusion of sound.

“Hold!” roared Sly, springing forward, “on your life, not another step.”

“Caitiff,” growled Hermann, turning to him fiercely, “who dares to stop me?”

Did demons at that instant possess them bodily, or was it but an outburst of the savagery of their evil natures, as they glared upon each other like tigers thirsting for blood?

There they stood, before the closed iron door of the treasure safe of the old miser, and both at that moment wished that the other was dead; that he alone might seize his hoarded wealth. A rusted key was in the door. Their outstretched hands met upon it, when they

angrily drew back as if about to fight. But the key did not turn readily.

Hermann paused, and his face grew livid with the mingled passions of hate, rage, and greed. It was as if several contending demons now overmastered him.

He set the light he held, close to the door at one side. "Stop, Sly," said he, "wait and you may have it all your own way."

At this he drew from an inner pocket, carefully but with triumphant malice, a woolen mitten, upon which he poured oil from a small vial, that was homeopathic in size.

"Put on this oiled mitten, Sly, and you will be able to turn the key."

"That's fair," said Sly, pacified.

"Let me help put it on, Sly," added Hermann; "it may be a tight fit, but it works like a charm."

So saying he bent forward, but as he did so he stumbled and slightly grazed Sly's hand with the diamond point of his cuff button, just enough to draw a little blood.

"Fool," roared Sly, "what are you about?"

"Beg pardon," pleaded Hermann, seeing Sly's bleeding hand, and with a strong, hard grip forcing the mitten on it. "Now turn the key quickly," he cried.

Sly made an eager movement and the penetrating oil instantly did its work. As the bolt yielded, Hermann pressed his own hand, which he had covered with a thick gauntlet, heavily on Sly's, who uttered a loud outcry as

sharp, lacerating pains shot up his arm. Instantly his hand began to swell and dropped powerless at his side, while a deathly nausea and faintness pervaded his frame.

“Die like the dog that you are,” bellowed Hermann, with a savage yell, and seizing the dim light, he sprang within the half opened door; yet at the same moment he recoiled with a terrified cry as he stood in the narrow space filled with mephitic air, face to face with the ghastly, grinning skeleton of the miser who had perished, fastened in by some recoil of the door, at the altar of his gods, within that very *adytum* where he had worshiped.

Everywhere glistened the sin-creating gold in uncounted, glittering, mocking heaps. Around, above, beneath, gold stretched out upon gold, pillowed on gold. Demoniac gold, that gave neither food, raiment, nor happiness; but starvation, wasting away, and oh, what a horrible death.

As Hermann recoiled, dismayed at the gruesome, spectral image, thus ever keeping grim watch and ward over that for which he had bartered his immortal soul, Sly, whose fast failing strength took in the scene with horrid exultation, made an expiring effort, and wielding his well arm with the energy of unbounded thirst of vengeance, hurled the springing door fast into its setting, and it closed upon Hermann with the same fixed and death-dealing bolt that had fastened in the miser.

“Die yourself like the dog that you are,” groaned Sly, as he sank upon the cold stones, already overcome

by the swift action of the deadly virus of the coluber, that now penetrated through every vein, madly coursing its way to paralyze the action of the heart.

But as the stupefaction caused by the poison overcame him, his ears were still lulled by what was to him the welcome music of Hermann's agonizing shrieks, as he in turn fully realized his own awful doom. The foul air was rent with fouler blasphemies, and Sly's death-bed was, by a swift act of retribution, far more appalling than the bedlam he had but twenty-four hours before pictured to Paulina, with gloating deliberation of malice, for her closing days.

Yet, so sweet is revenge to the lost soul, that as he stiffened in the rigors of death, a fiendish smile was stamped upon his face, for the last sounds that feebly reached his fading senses, were the hellish execrations of his enemy. * * * * *

Within that eventful forty-eight hours the storm king had passed in fury over that sin-tossed spot, and the demons of the air had screamed in wildest chorus of fiendish joy at the scenes being enacted within the desolate old manse; but now their limit was reached, their rude carnival ended, and fair nature, rejoicing, donned her most beauteous, jeweled robe.

The glorious sun shone upon the now snow-vestured mountain-top, casting over its pure bosom a softly-tinted radiance, and from every bough and projecting craggy point hung pendent icicles, each congealed drop aglow with rainbow prisms.

The crisp, clear air, gave forth a musical resonance to the delighted ear, and an exhilarating, bracing influence, that would have made a man rejoice to live and have his being, then and there.

But none of God's creatures remained to praise Him on that beautiful winter's morning, as his glory enwrapped the mountain-top as with a king's lustrous, empurpled mantle. Only the frenzied wretch who tortured the unwilling air in the noisome cell below — he alone remained.

And was he not in the near approaching throes of dissolution, ever wrestling with the inexorable angel of death?

Yet he held one wild hope—the expected carriage would come, and he would make himself heard. Then he would be released. How hours were counted when minutes seemed ages; yet the time did come, and his strained ear caught the rumble of the carriage wheels, reverberating on the frozen earth.

Great God! was there ever agony like this blended anguish and suspense?

The driver stopped, shouted, tramped through the house, opening every door, looking into every room below, and then ascended the stairs to the chamber above.

Hermann reserved all his strength for this supreme effort, and as the man entered the miser's room, he gave one awful shriek from his stony sepulchre below, hearing which, the terrified man bounded with loud outcry down the creaking stairs, screaming that the place

was haunted, and scrambling up to his seat, drove rapidly away.

Now the crazed criminal below knew that his doom was irrevocable. At his side was afterwards found a faintly scribbled paper, written at intervals by the dim light. The broken sentences ran thus:

“I confess that there is a God—yes—I believe, and tremble. It was I who threw the bomb. Oh, the sickening slaughter! Even in this dismal dungeon I can see the quivering limbs. Will they never be at rest? I escaped from human, but I perish by divine vengeance. Cruel God, I hate you, I abhor you! Satan, come, be more merciful than that other one. A last joy is mine. The old hag whom he called Mrs. Brown has been here. She fell on Sly’s loathsome body and called him ‘son.’ I yelled to her—she screamed back, a raving maniac—mother and son—oh, how sweet is revenge.”

It is supposed that Hermann survived some ten days before he finally yielded up the ghost in that charnel treasure vault, where years before the sordid miser had found a living tomb.

No pen could ever trace the agonies of that slow torture, whose horrors can alone find expression in language invented by despair; in that lowest depth where unrepenting sinners suffer eternal torment.

* * * * *

After Neale Voland arrived home, he impatiently expected the return of Sly and Hermann, as he was espe-

cially anxious to see the former, in order to have a conversation with him about Pry, and find out why he suspected the latter of eloping with Paulina, for, in his hurried departure from the manse, he had accepted the statement without demanding proofs.

Several days having elapsed and neither of the men appearing, Voland decided to employ a detective to make some inquiries for him. He discovered that Paulina, with his child and Nora, had reached Hazlehurst, unaccompanied by any one, the evening of the day that she left the mountain, and also, that she was so ill that her recovery was doubtful. He also learned, that although Pry had been absent two days from his office, yet he had appeared there as usual on the morning succeeding Paulina's return home, nor had he visited her at any time.

The mere fact of his absence for two days, did not connect him in any way with the escape of Paulina, and no clue could be obtained as to his movements during that period. However, his uneasiness about the continued absence of Sly and Hermann increased, and finally his agitation became so great, that he reluctantly employed the services of the same detective, to procure more direct information than he had been able to glean.

At the end of some days, the official came back with the startling news that there was a current report of a double murder having been committed at the old house on the mountain. The man finally added, with some hesitation, that he thought it his duty to mention,

that Mr. Voland's own name was rather unpleasantly connected with their fatal journey to that place.

At hearing this, Voland evinced so much perturbation, that some latent suspicions the detective was beginning to entertain were rather confirmed.

Voland was too practiced a man of the world to fail to interpret the keen glance directed to him, and when he was left alone, and could consider his situation carefully, he realized with immense trepidation what a subtle chain of circumstantial evidence could be woven against him, and it would be difficult to dispel all doubts, without unraveling the whole scheme.

He was indeed prostrated at the bare idea of being involved in such disgrace, and he passed a terrible night, filled with remorse and self-accusations.

But, after carefully considering the situation in which he was placed, he came to the conclusion that Pry was the only one likely to assist him to clear away the painful mystery. He, therefore, determined to lose no time, but to overcome any ill feeling he might have in his regard, and consult Pry at an early hour the next morning. During that night, as he reviewed the past seven years, his soul was filled with bitterness at the startling retrospect. There rose before him the image of Miriam, his gentle bride, in all her loveliness. He recalled how he had wooed her with passionate pursuit; nor had he ever dreamed, in those first days of their wedded bliss, that he could possibly have been

capable of casting a life so tenderly cherished, into the deepest shadow.

“It all comes,” cried he, “from this accursed facility of divorce. Did the laws of my country protect marriage as a solemn religious rite, and hedge it round with safeguards that would make it an inviolable union, I could never have so basely yielded to temptation. But I looked upon matrimony as a mere civil contract, to be lightly held or broken at pleasure. Did this nation, as a Christian nation should, enforce the indissolubility of matrimony, I would at this moment be a happy husband and a proud father. But now, having availed myself of the license our lax laws gave, what has fallen upon me? Naught but ruin, ruin!”

The next morning Neale Voland sought Pry at his office. He felt ill when he left home, for he had scarcely slept at all; and when he did sleep he was troubled with disturbed dreams. He experienced a strange heaviness, almost amounting to dimness of vision, with buzzing in the ears and pain in his head. But his mind was so preoccupied that he scarcely gave heed to his physical condition.

He found Pry in his office, who at once accosted him hurriedly, saying:

“Mr. Voland, you are the very man I most wished to see. This awful tragedy of the double murder creates the greatest excitement; and, I am pained to say, that your name is disagreeably mixed up with some mysterious circumstances connected with the crime. I was about seeking you to confer with you.”

“Great God!” shuddered Neale Voland, “what is it all about?” His face assumed a mottled, purplish look, and he slightly reeled.

“Why,” said Pry, who seemed to find a pleasure in prolonging his suspense, “it is the most awful affair. My senior partner was found murdered in the old manse, where his mother, who, it seems, had escaped from a sick bed at a farmer’s house near by, was found wandering about, a raving maniac; and your valet, Hermann, has also met with a fearful death at the same place. And what is still more curious, there are weird stories regarding the time and the manner of these deaths. It is even asserted that the doom that befell these men was predicted. They died, Sly, within twenty-four hours, and Hermann in the ten days prophesied.”

At this moment Neale Voland groaned, exclaiming, “The fullness of time has come for the third. Oh, God! have pity on a poor sinner!”

At these words, Pry, alarmed at his aspect, rushed to support him, just as Voland fell heavily forward, breathing stertorously.

Every effort was made to restore him, but he never regained consciousness, lingering some twenty-four hours in a comatose state, when he died.

And thus it came to pass, in God’s providence, that what had indeed been but idle words, spoken at random, proved to be a true foretelling of the near-coming doom of the three conspirators. That these things came to pass

was neither within the range of the supernatural, nor of the preternatural, but it certainly was a singular coincidence.

The whole subject of coincidental effects is one well worthy of the serious investigation of the scientist. These sequences occur too often and are too striking in their nature to be slightly set aside as a mere chance. The fact is, there is no such thing as chance in the providential plan, and he who observes causes most accurately, will be the most likely to come to a correct conclusion as to what will occur as a consequence.

Pry was horrified at the sudden death of Voland, and he reproached himself for the manner of his announcement. He had been greatly shocked by the nefarious conspiracy, into which Voland had entered, for the abduction of Paulina, although he knew Sly had been the prime mover in this wicked scheme. In fact, he had intended to play upon Voland's superstitious fears and punish him by creating harassing doubts, which afterward he meant to explain away.

He was profoundly agitated at the unexpected fulfillment of his own pretended prophecy, for it was in truth he who had personated the evil one, that tempestuous night, when he so successfully carried out his admirable plan of escape.

To do as he had done, required extraordinary nerve and force of character, as well as a kind and generous nature.

He had been taken into partnership by Sly as a needy young lawyer of fine ability, who he thought would

serve as a useful and supple tool in his infamous projects. But Sly, as is often the case with designing men who measure others by themselves, overshot his mark, and was quite mistaken in his estimate of Pry.

He had, to be sure, even much greater ability than Sly had supposed, but he was not low or intriguing, and as he gradually became aware of the unscrupulous acts of his senior, he began to watch him very narrowly, with the intention, so soon as he could safely do so, to disassociate himself from so depraved a man. Thus, we find him overhearing the interview with Voland and Hermann, through which he was made aware of their plot. He at once determined to save Paulina, and had at first thought of taking some officers of the law with him; but when he weighed the whole situation, he finally decided on the daring plan adopted. The awful storm raging, his knowledge of the subterranean passage, and the heavy drinking of the conspirators, all aided him. These were what might be called adjuncts, which a clever man could in a measure foresee, and they came to his aid. His own skill did the rest. And the innocent ones were saved, through his instrumentality.

There was one phase that he did not trust himself to scan too closely. Had he been guided solely by benevolence of purpose, or was there a deeper sentiment that caused him thus to risk his life? He dared not deny that there was, and now that Neale Voland was dead, he no longer hesitated to avow it himself that an immense love for Paulina filled his soul.

But how wretched this confession made him! At first he had said to himself, "if I save her she will marry me," but having saved her, having witnessed her noble self-sacrifice, her calmness and fortitude, he recognized himself as all unworthy.

Thus, he had never made himself known to her as her deliverer. He began to live upon a higher plane, to aspire to excellence, and to think of Paulina as some fixed star of great magnitude, which might always be found in the heavens, but to whose heights he could never hope to rise. Pry was going through a purifying process, out of which he was to emerge a man of high resolves and noble acts.

Several things he had already determined on — one was, that he would at once resume his proper name, which was Oscar Pryor, and not Obadiah Pry.

When Sly had taken him as his junior, he intuitively felt that his position might not add to the reputation of a good old family name, and he amused himself with the euphemism of "C. Sly and O. Pry." But now he had grown past youthful follies, he would strive to do honor to his own name, and make it respected in the community, and in order to carry this good intention into effect, he was firmly resolved never again, no matter what the temptation, to soil his conscience by assisting to procure divorces, except as the defender of the oppressed. He would in future solely use his accurate knowledge of divorce laws, to enable the maligned to escape snares laid for them by the designing. Thus,

by a series of good deeds, did he hope gradually to lift himself nearer the pedestal upon which Paulina stood.

Filled with this worthy ambition, some days after Neale Voland's death he went to Hazlehurst, in order to make the announcement to Paulina of that divorce which death had made for her.

Paulina had been dangerously ill. The fearful strain she had endured, the horror of that night's peril, had brought on a low, nervous fever, but she was now, thanks to the unremitting care of Nora, the loving caresses of the dear child, and the untiring devotion of a good physician, restored to life and returning health. But a deep melancholy brooded over her. She saw so much in the future to terrify her—her union with Voland, her fear of Sly, her dread of having the child taken away from her, and there was always a secret horror of some new plot against her liberty or her life.

Nor, were these apprehensions mere phantoms of the imagination, for had these men lived, her danger would have been extreme.

When Pry was announced, she was seated in that very bay window of the drawing-room, where, on the wedding evening, she had gazed out upon a dull and leaden sky.

But now the brightness of a pleasant, sunny winter's day, spoke of hope and of clouds dispelled.

As he entered she was greatly agitated, for she feared that he was but an unwelcome messenger of bad news from Neale Voland, or what was worse, the dreaded Sly.

But Pry's manner was dignified, modest, and deferential, and it composed her. She bade him be seated, and they two occupied the recessed window.

She looked at him appealingly, and he felt the pathos of her saddened expression.

"Madam," said he, "I beg you to listen calmly as I make known to you, how God in his mercy has saved you."

She clasped her hands, and tears filled her eyes.

"It is kindness," added he, his voice trembling so that he could scarcely speak, "to tell you at once that all those who could or would have injured you, are dead. He whom you married, Neale Volland, died of apoplexy but a few days since. Sly and Hermann met with a violent death at the old manse where we left them, and in a vault of that house is stored away a vast sum of money, which is the property of Neale Volland's son, through his mother."

"May God have mercy on the souls of the dead," solemnly prayed Paulina, very pale. "But why, sir, should you say where *we* left them?"

Oscar Pryor hesitated, then in a low and husky voice, said:

"Know, most excellent of women, that under divine Providence, it was I, who, disguised, ventured my life to save yours."

"Oh," exclaimed Paulina, "my noblest, best, most generous of friends, I owe to you a never-ending debt of gratitude. How can I ever begin to repay it?"

“If,” answered he timidly, “you would deign to honor me, by allowing me to continue to protect you, if perchance you ever need protection; and if you will at the same time permit me to admire you as the loveliest of your sex, I shall be happy.”

“She will,” chirped the clear, infantile voice of the bewitching little Neale Volland, who had been curled up on an ottoman near, hidden from view by the heavy drapery of the window, “and if you will promise never to be naughty, you may be my dear, new papa.”





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